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THE
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By COLONEL JAMES FISKE

FIGHTING IN THE CLOUDS FOR FRANCE

FACING THE GERMAN FOE

ON BOARD THE MINE-LAYING CRUISER

UNDER FIRE FOR SERVIA

THE BELGIANS TO THE FRONT

IN RUSSIAN TRENCHES

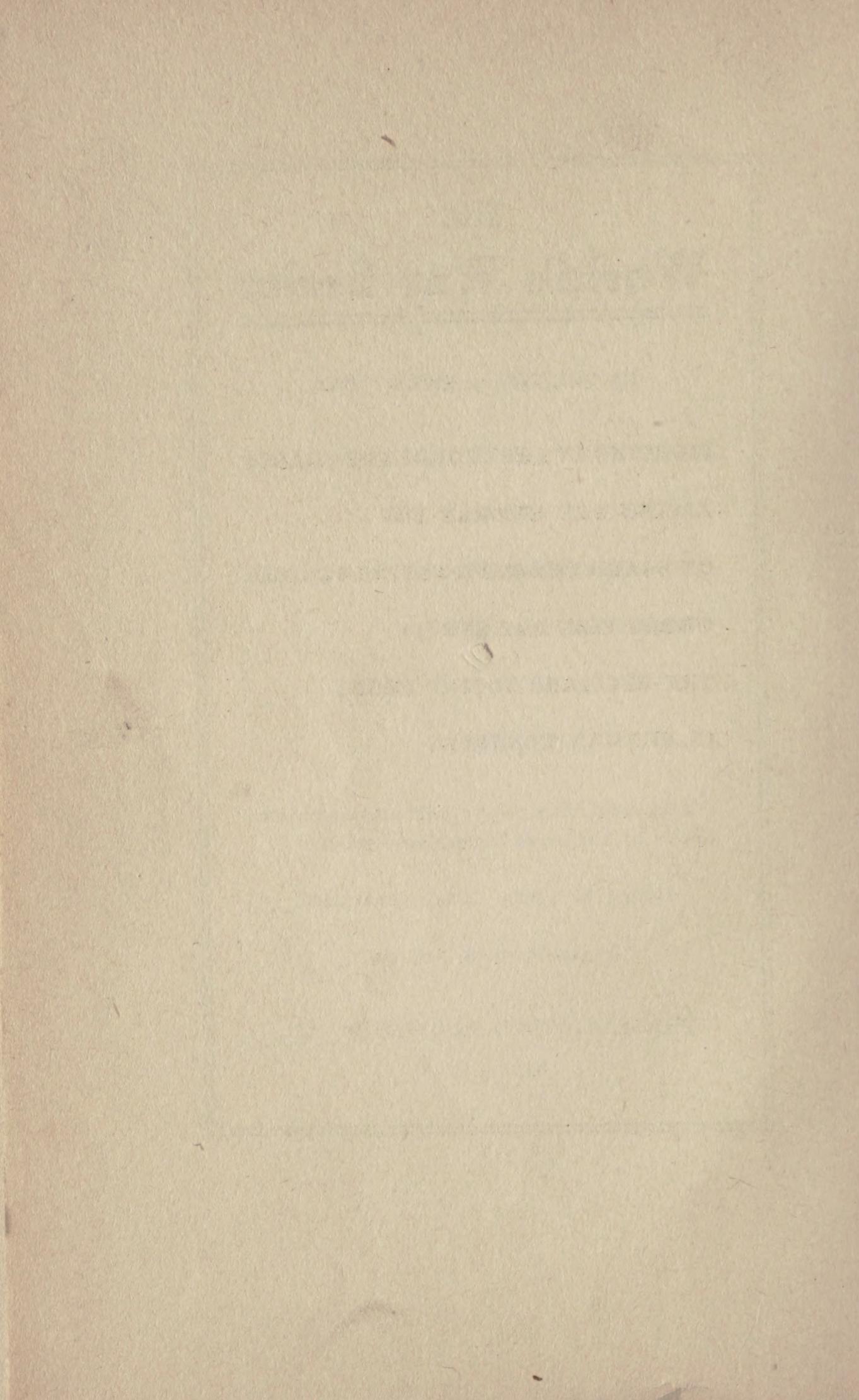
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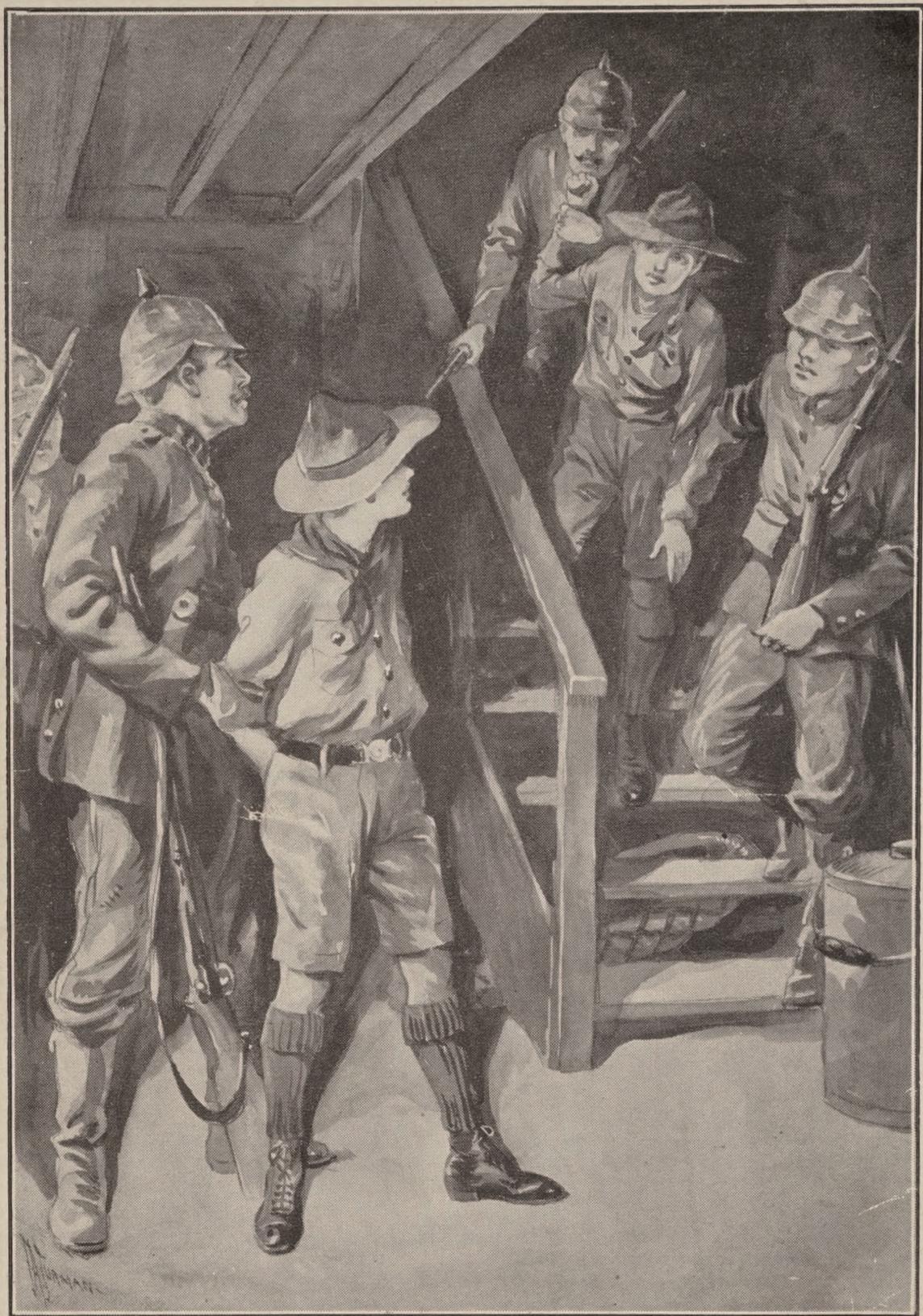
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"Unless you can prove that you are innocent, you will be tried as spies," said the lieutenant.

World's War Series, Volume 5

The Belgians to the Front

BY

Colonel James Fiske



Illustrated by E. A. FURMAN

THE SAALFIELD PUBLISHING COMPANY

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The Belgians To The Front

CHAPTER I

A DISCOVERY

In the great public square of the ancient city of Liege, in Belgium, a troop of Belgian Boy Scouts stood at attention. Staffs in hand, clad in the short knickerbockers, the khaki shirts and the wide campaign hats that mark the Boy Scout all over the world, they were enough of a spectacle to draw the attention of the busy citizens of Liege, who stopped to watch them admiringly. Their scoutmaster, Armand Van Verde, had been addressing them. And now in the fading light of the late afternoon, he dismissed them.

At once the troop broke up, first into patrols, then into small individual groups of two or three. The faces of the scouts were grave for it was serious news indeed that Van Verde had communi-

cated to the troop at the meeting just ended.

Paul Latour called sharply to his great friend, Arthur Waller.

"Come on, Arthur," he said. "We'd better be getting along home. There may be something for us to do."

"All right," agreed Arthur, cheerfully. He was a little younger than his chum, and was nearly always willing to agree to anything Paul proposed.

The two boys were not natives of Liege. However, they spent their summers with relatives who lived in the country a few miles beyond the limits of the famous old town, in the direction of the village of Esneux. They themselves came from Brussels, and, while not themselves related, were both cousins of the family which they were now visiting, that of M. de Frenard.

So now, striking out with a good, swinging pace, they made their way rapidly through the streets of the old town of Liege, narrow and crooked, once they were beyond the great square. They passed

over the new Exposition Bridge and so to the new town of Liege, where the great steel works of Seraing were beginning to cast red reflections against the darkening sky.

“They have begun to work all night long,” said Arthur.

“It’s a good thing, too,” said Paul, soberly. “If there is to be a war, as Mr. Van Verde says, we may need all the guns they can turn out.”

“But we shall not go to war, Paul! Belgium is neutral. All the powers joined in declaring Belgium to be a neutral state. We have learned that in our history in school!”

“I know that, Arthur. But will the Germans respect our neutrality? If they don’t, we shall have to defend ourselves against them. And the first attack will be here, at Liege.”

“Then these forts that Uncle Henri showed us will really be useful? They are strong forts, Paul.”

“I hope not. But just because there are forts there it is a sign that the government has feared

an invasion, Arthur. I hope that if there is war we shall stay out of it. But Belgium has always been exposed to war when her great neighbors fought. Some of the greatest battles in the history of the world have been fought on our soil."

"I know! Waterloo was where Napoleon was beaten finally. We have seen that battlefield, Paul, you and I. Do you think there may be a battle there again? That would be exciting!"

"Waterloo was only one. Ramillies was fought in Belgium, too, and many other battles. Even Cæsar fought here. Do you remember the place where he says that of all the tribes he conquered, the bravest were the Belgians?"

"Oh, that's so! I'd forgotten that! But, Paul, you said there might be something for us to do. What did you mean?"

"I'm not sure yet, Arthur, and I'd rather not say anything more until I am. But I want you to slip out with me to-night, after dinner. We'll find out then, for certain. And I don't want to tell Uncle Henri or anyone else, and afterward find I

was wrong. We'd be laughed at then, you see."

"Then you have found something! Oh, tell me, Paul! I won't repeat it to a soul!"

"You'll know all in good time. Do you remember that man who tried the other day to get work as a gardener?"

"Yes, I do. Uncle Henri didn't have any work for him, but he sent him to the factory in Seraing, and told him they would give him a job."

"That's the one. You know he said he was hungry, and that he hadn't been able to get any work for a long time, so he didn't have any money. Uncle Henri told the cook to give him a dinner."

"Yes, and I was sorry he didn't get a place. He looked as if he would have been all right."

"Well, Arthur, I saw him again, last night! He was in Esneux, and he seemed to have plenty of money, though he hadn't gone to Seraing to get work. He was in Madame Ribet's wine shop, and he was treating everyone. Do you know what he paid with?"

"No."

"A German gold piece! That's how I know about it, because Madame Ribet had never seen such a coin before, and she was afraid it wasn't good. So she came out, and when she saw me she asked me, and I told her it was good, of course."

"Well, that's nothing, Paul. We often see German money here in Liege. Isn't it like that in all places that are near a border? I suppose that on the other side there is a lot of French money. Why, there is, even in Brussels."

"It may mean nothing at all, Arthur. I hope it doesn't. But I think it's funny that that man should be staying around so. He must have told Uncle Henri a lie when he said he didn't have money. I'd like to know what he's up to. I'd like to be sure that he's not a German spy."

"Oh, I never thought of that! A spy! Why should the Germans have spies around here, though, Paul?"

"It's just the place where they would have them, Arthur. The forts! They want to find out all they can about them. Boncelles is near us; so

is the fort of Embourg. They want to know if our people are ready. If they come through Belgium, you know, they will want to get through as quickly as they can, to attack the French."

"But I don't see why they should want to come through Belgium at all, Paul. Why can't they leave us alone? They can attack the French along their own border, I should think."

"They can. But the French know that, and they have their strongest fortresses all along there, from Belfort to Verdun. It would take the Germans weeks, months perhaps, to get past these fortifications along the border, and that would give the French time to bring up all their soldiers. And the Germans have to beat the French quickly this time, or else not at all. They aren't fighting France alone, but Russia as well, and their plan must be to beat France first and then turn on Russia. They think that here in Belgium it will be easy for them to get around these forts. If they once get behind them, the French will have to retreat. And the Germans think that the quick-

est way to bring that is for them to go through our country and so attack Paris."

"They ought to be stopped!" said Arthur, hotly. "England and France would help us, wouldn't they?"

"France certainly would, because she would have to. And I believe the English would help, too. I hope so. Because even if the Germans promised to go away as soon as they'd beaten France, I don't believe they would. They'd make Belgium a part of Germany."

"They can't do that! They shan't! Why, we're not German! We're a free country!"

"Yes, but we may have to fight to remain free, Arthur. Free countries have had to do that before. If there is war, I think we shall see the Germans here within a day of its declaration. We had better hope for peace. But we must be prepared for war—and we must not deceive ourselves. A treaty guarantees our neutrality, but I think the time is coming when treaties will be forgotten."

"We shall have to teach these Germans to re-

member them, then," said Arthur, valiantly. "We may be weak, but we are brave, we Belgians. I believe we can give them something to think about."

Paul smiled a little sadly. He understood the true facts, the real possibilities, better than his friend.

"If it comes to fighting, we will do our part," he said, "but we should be helpless against Germany alone, Arthur. The only thing we could do would be to try to hold them back long enough for the French and the English to come to our aid. Either that, or we would have to let them pass through without resisting them."

"So that they could fall on France? But that would be treachery!" said Arthur, indignantly. "I have heard of that treaty of neutrality. We are safeguarded from attack, but we are forbidden to allow the troops of a country that is at war to pass through our territory. If it was the French who talked of invading us to reach Germany, I should say that we must fight them."

"Yes, you're right, Arthur," said Paul. "I think we should make any sacrifice to keep faith. But be sure that it will be a terrible sacrifice, if we must make it."

"Look there!" whispered Arthur, suddenly. "Someone started up just now from behind the bushes. A man — and he is running away from us!"

"After him!" cried Paul. "It looks — yes, it is the man I spoke of!"

They ran as hard as they could, shouting as they went, in the hope that someone might intercept the fugitive. But he had too good a start, and in a few moments he had distanced them by climbing a rail fence and disappearing into a thicket that came down to the edge of a field.

"No use!" said Paul, disgustedly. "He got away from us. But I don't suppose it would have done us any good to catch him. We couldn't have done anything — hello!"

He ended with an exclamation of surprise, and stooped over. They were at the foot of the fence

the flying figure had climbed a moment before.

“What is it, Paul?” asked Arthur, eagerly.

“This!” said Paul. He held up a small black pocket-book, and from it he took a package of papers, wrapped in oil silk. “I struck against it with my foot! I wonder if that man who was running could have dropped it?”

It was almost dark by this time; too dark, at any rate, for them to be able to see the papers. But then Arthur remembered the pocket flashlight he carried and produced it, switching on the light.

“Let’s have a look,” he said.

They unwrapped the oil silk covering. And, at the first sight of what was within it, they gasped. They were holding in their hands a complete sketch of the fort of Boncelles, the most important of the works defending Liege to the southwest. Before they could examine it more fully there was a shout from the fence. The spy had missed his papers. They saw him for a moment. But now it was their turn to run.

CHAPTER II

THE MARKED PLANS

The fierce shouting of the man as he called on them to stop did not terrify either of the scouts, but it did confirm Paul's guess. There could no longer be any doubt that his presence meant mischief; that he was indeed a spy. Or else why should he have such papers? Why, again, should their loss so greatly disturb him?

There was not a chance for him to catch them. Well as he might know the country, they knew it better. They had played in these fields and woods since they had been able to walk at all. Every hollow, every ridge, every tree, almost, was familiar to them. Circling about, they soon reached the garden of their summer home, a fine, spacious house, with ample grounds surrounding it, that belonged to their Uncle Henri de Frenard, whose wealth was derived from his considerable holdings of coal land around Liege.

"Did you get a good look at him, Paul?" gasped Arthur, when at last they felt that it was safe for them to stop running. "I couldn't really make sure of him —"

"I think I'll know him again, Arthur. What I'm wondering is if he'll know us."

"I don't see what difference that makes, except that if he saw us before we saw him, it would give him a chance to escape —"

"We're more likely to be trying to escape from him than he from us, I'm afraid, Arthur, for a little while. If the Germans are spying as openly as all that, it must mean that they're getting ready to come into Belgium. They wouldn't take such chances unless they felt that it didn't make any difference now."

"Don't you think we could find him, Paul? If we could, we could have him arrested, I think."

"Don't say a word — yet," cautioned Paul. "Uncle Henri would only laugh at us. Let's wait until we can look at his papers, and see what there really is there besides the sketch of Fort Bon-

celles. If that's all there was in the papers, I don't see why he was so awfully anxious to get them back. Perhaps we've done even better than we know, Arthur."

"All right, I won't say anything," said Arthur. "But you are going to do something about it, aren't you, Paul?"

Paul laughed. He knew that Arthur was a little disappointed at the idea of having to keep what they had done secret, especially as he had probably rehearsed already the astonishment with which all those at the dinner table would greet the startling announcement of the discovery of the spy.

"I certainly hope we're going to do something about it, Arthur," he said. "We'll slip away from the table as soon as we can, and then when we're alone, we'll see exactly what it is we've got."

But at the table there was a great surprise for them. Their uncle (though they both called him uncle the relationship was not really so close) was not in his accustomed seat, and Madame de Fre-

nard's eyes were suspiciously red. She had been crying.

"Uncle Henri may not be back for two or three days," she said, gravely. "He is a member of parliament, as you know, and he has been called to Brussels on account — on account of what we all hope may not come."

"War?" asked Arthur, in a hushed voice.

"It looks terribly as if war must come," she said. "And if it does, I am afraid our poor Belgium must suffer as well as the lands that are really concerned. We have done nothing; we want nothing except to be left alone. If they will only do that! But I am afraid we must not hope for that. Your uncle expects to join the army at once if there is an invasion."

"Then we'll stay here and look after you," proposed Arthur, promptly. "Won't we, Paul?"

"For as long as we are needed," Paul said, gravely.

It was easy enough for them to cut their dinner short that night. The house was uneasy, stirring

with a strange foreboding of what was to come. Servants, everyone, indeed, seemed to look always toward the east. There were the Germans. Often during the summer they drove to Aix-la-Chapelle, the first city over the German border — Aachen, as the Germans called it. Paul remembered, with a smile, as he thought of the German city, how indignant he had been when he had first discovered that the Germans invariably spoke of Liege as Luttich, and how he had been appeased when he was told that he and most people outside of Germany refused to adopt the German name for Aix-la-Chapelle.

No one in the house, least of all their aunt, had time that night to think of the two boys. As a matter of fact, it was that now famous Saturday upon which Germany finally cast the die by declaring war upon Russia in the interest of her Austrian ally, whose quarrel with Servia she thus made her own. France, as the ally of Russia, was bound to fight Germany. Belgium lay between the two huge powers on either side of her, well-nigh

certain to be caught in the disaster that war meant. But the news that war had actually been declared had not yet come. Madame de Frenard was waiting with the utmost anxiety for a telephone message from her husband in Brussels, who had promised to send her word as soon as there were any important developments.

And so Paul and Arthur slipped out to the garage, which was a favorite hiding place. Now it was especially safe, since Marcel, the chauffeur, had gone to Brussels with their uncle, and there was no likelihood of any unwelcome interruptions. They repaired, therefore, to the room above the one in which their uncle's automobile was kept, and spread out the papers they had captured from the German spy. First there was the sketch they had already seen of the Boncelles fort; then, equally detailed, they found sketches and maps of the other forts — Flemalle, Embourg, Chaudfontaine, Fleron, Evgnee, Pontisse, Liers, Lanlin, Longin and Hollogne — the great chain of detached forts that made Liege, in the opinion of

military engineers, one of the strongest fortified towns in Europe.

These forts were not immediately in the town; they were about five miles, on an average, from the old citadel, long since disused as a place for actual fighting. The connections between the various forts, intended, as both boys knew, for the greater facility of their defence by means of troops fighting more or less independently, were carefully traced on another map, in which the contour of the land and the natural shelter were shown. And on this map, at certain spots, there were strange marks — well beyond the perimeter of the forts themselves, that is, outside the line that might be drawn around Liege and passing through each of the forts.

“Look at those crosses,” said Paul. “What do you suppose they mean, Arthur?”

“I don’t know,” said Arthur, frowning. “But we can find out, you know.”

“You mean by going to one or two of these places? They’re some distance off.”

“But we ought to find out—don’t you think so?”

“Yes, you’re right, of course. We can find them easily enough.”

“Yes. All we’ve got to do is to take the map along with us. Then when we get near we can make sure by looking at it.”

“We could do that, but I think we won’t, Arthur. Suppose we ran into the man it belongs to again? We might not get away from him another time, and I think it would be just as well to leave these maps here. We can hide them, and then write a note and leave it where it will be found in the morning, telling them where we hid the maps.”

“What’s the use of hiding them if we tell some one where they are, Paul?”

“Can’t you see? Suppose something happens to us, so that we can’t get back? We’d want the maps to be found and taken to the commander of the forts, wouldn’t we?”

“Of course. I didn’t think of that, that’s all.

But if we come back we can get the note back before anyone sees it. Is that what you mean, Paul?"

"Yes. Now study that map very carefully. I think we can remember where the cross marks are, all right."

"I can remember this one," said Arthur. "It's exactly on the spot where that new house was built last summer, near the Ourthe. Don't you remember? We stopped and got some milk there, and we wondered how a farmer could build such a solid looking house when he didn't seem to have much money or much of anything else. A stupid fellow, he was. He scarcely knew enough to give us the milk we wanted."

"Yes, I remember now," said Paul, looking at the map again. He was thinking hard, trying to fathom the connection between what they both remembered of that house and the strange, significant cross on the map. There was a connection; the cross did have some significance. Of so much he was sure. But for the life of him that was all

he could guess. It was a perplexing problem.

"Come on," he said, at last, impatiently. "I may be very stupid, but I don't understand. The only way we'll find out will be by going there."

"All right," agreed Arthur, grinning. "I'm wiser than you for once, Paul. I haven't even tried to find out. I know I can't guess, so I'm not wasting time trying to. I think we'll be lucky if we find out when we do get there."

"So do I, come to think of it," said Paul. Somehow he felt better; before he had been inclined to blame himself for being stupid. "After all, you know, Arthur, even if they didn't expect anyone like us to get hold of these maps and sketches, that doesn't mean that they would make everything on them so plain that you could guess it at first sight. That sort of mark is awfully easy to understand when you have the key, but it's as bad as a cipher if you haven't."

It was quite dark, of course, when they finally set out. Though it was Saturday night few people were about, and the locality was a lonely one.

Then, too, all of those who could had gone into the town. It was there that news of what was going on in the great world outside would first be had; it was there that the country people could count upon getting the first hint of the intelligence that was to have so frightful a meaning for them.

The course the two scouts took carried them along the bank of the placid Ourthe, flowing peacefully, calmly along toward its confluence with the more important stream of the Meuse at Liege. Behind them one strange thing proved that all was not quite normal. From Fort Boncelles a searchlight began to play. They had seen that light before, but only when it was being tested or when there were manœuvres in progress. Now it seemed to have a sinister meaning.

"I think that means that there is war," said Paul. "They are keeping the searchlight going so that they may be sure to escape a surprise."

"I think it's the Germans who will get the surprise," said Arthur, confidently.

But most of the time they walked on in silence.

Both were thinking a good deal; thinking of what war might mean, and wondering what part they themselves might play if it came. Of one thing they were sure. All Belgium would rise to repel the invader, no matter what the pretext for the invasion might be.

"Here we are," said Arthur, suddenly. "That's the house, Paul."

"It looks quite dark, Arthur. But let's go along toward it. Not by the road — we'll cut through this field here."

This they proceeded to do. But suddenly, as they neared the house, the ground seemed to give way beneath Paul. He suppressed a cry, and the next moment he was vigorously turning back the treacherous ground with his foot. Arthur turned on his light. And there, beneath the soft loam, they saw a plate of shining steel.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY

Utterly bewildered, they stared down at the steel.

“Put out your light!” said Paul, suddenly. His voice was tense. “Keep still a moment! See if you can hear anyone moving around near us.”

They were absolutely still for a full minute, but there were only the familiar sounds of the night.

“All right,” said Paul. “Now you watch and listen while I dig down here and see what this is about.”

“Why can’t I dig, too?”

“Because it’s better for you to watch. Besides, I want to dig so that I can put the earth back in a hurry, and fix this place so that it won’t look as if it had been disturbed.”

Then he fell to, working silently and quickly, like a mole, digging with his hands until his nails were torn and his fingers were raw and bleeding.

But Paul did not mind that. He had already made a guess, and a shrewd one, as to the meaning of this strange discovery that they had made. It was not long before he found that the steel plate extended for only a short distance. Around this, and spreading beneath it, was a bed of cement. As soon as he had satisfied himself of that, using Arthur's flashlight, Paul stopped digging, and began carefully to replace the earth. Then, calling on Arthur to help him, he trampled down the earth.

"There!" he said. "I don't believe anyone would know we had been here, unless they were suspicious already."

"But what is it?" asked Arthur. "Paul, tell me!"

"I'm going to, Arthur. Don't worry. But come away from here. We don't want to be caught around here — and, besides, there's still a good deal for us to do."

Swiftly they made their way to the road, away from the cottage and the field where they had made their discovery.

“Now!” said Arthur, after a little distance had been covered, stopping short. “I won’t go a step further until you tell me what that place is meant for!”

“It’s meant for a big gun — that’s what it’s meant for!” said Paul, vehemently. “Can’t you see? A siege gun can’t be fired from a carriage, or even from ordinary ground. The recoil would bury it in the earth if they tried that. There’s got to be a regular emplacement for it — a firm base of concrete and steel, so that it will withstand the shock of firing!”

“You mean they’d mount a gun here?”

“I mean just that! It takes days, almost weeks, to do that. They have to pour the concrete and let it stand until it’s set. But here they’ve got everything ready! They can bring up their guns, place them, and begin firing, all in less than twenty-four hours! They must have been preparing for this for months — perhaps for years!”

“The cowards! We’ve never done anything to them!”

"No, they're not cowards," said Paul, thoughtfully. "I suppose they think they're right, and that as long as that is so, they are justified in using any means at all to win. But I think we can put a spoke in their wheel, just the same."

"I don't see how, Paul. There aren't enough soldiers in Liege to watch every spot where there's a cross marked on these maps."

"No, but that's not the only way, Arthur."

"It's the only way to stop them from bringing up their siege gun, isn't it? I know what the plan is in case of an attack. It is for the forts to hold off the Germans until there's time for the French army to come up and relieve them. And they're not supposed to be able to stand the fire of heavy guns. The plan was made for use against an army that wouldn't have time to bring up its siege artillery."

"Yes, that's true enough. But, just the same, I think we can help. I'm so sure of it that I'm going to take these plans into Liege to-night and try to get them to General Leman."

“I’m with you, Paul! Are we to go now?”

“Not quite yet. I’m interested in this house, too. I want to find out whatever we can about it before we go in. Don’t you see what our finding that gun mounting means, Arthur? Finding it just where we did — in a field that belongs to that house?”

“You mean there may be spies there now?”

“I don’t say that they’re there now. But I think they have been there. And I know I’m going to find out all we can.”

“All right. I think we ought to do that, too. Let’s get along! It’ll be awfully late when we get into Liege, I’m afraid.”

The house that had suddenly assumed such an air of mystery, so great an importance, was dark as they approached. Not a light showed from its windows. But they took no chances, none the less. They got very close to it without detection; they were able to go up to the windows. And, listening there, they heard not a sound inside to indicate that anyone was within.

"I'm going in," said Paul, suddenly. "Let me have your light, Arthur."

"Can't I come in, too?"

"One of us must stay outside and keep watch," said Paul. "It's the hardest part of the job, Arthur. If you stay outside, watch carefully, especially near the door. Hide, so that you won't be seen, but in a place where you can see anyone who comes. And if anyone is coming, call like a quail. I'll be listening, and I'll slip out of this back window and get back to you. But if they catch me, go back and get the plans, and then hurry into Liege. Tell General Leman, if you can get to him, or a staff officer, if you can't, everything that has happened since we found these papers, whether it seems important to you or not. Something that may not seem to mean anything at all may really be very important."

"But it seems to me you're taking all the risk," protested Arthur. "That isn't fair."

"It's just as risky outside as in," said Paul. "Here goes! Off with you, now, and find a good

place to hide! We haven't any time to lose, I can tell you. If there's no one inside now, they won't leave a place like this deserted very long, I'm sure."

Arthur went off reluctantly, but, as usual, he obeyed Paul to the letter. He found a clump of bushes from which, without being seen himself, he could watch the door of the house, and there he crouched down to wait. It was dull work, and, after he had once settled himself, he was afraid to move lest unseen eyes be watching somewhere in the neighborhood.

Meanwhile Paul was busy getting into the house. It was easier than he had thought it likely to be. The catch on the window was simplicity itself and he forced it with his penknife without any difficulty at all.

"I feel like a burglar," he thought to himself, as he climbed in. "But I don't care. Even if there's nothing wrong in here, I've got the right, in a time like this, to make sure. Every Belgian has to think of his country first now."

And he was pretty sure that there was a decided connection between this cottage, so strangely stout in its construction, and the unquestionably threatening and sinister discovery he and Arthur had made in the field only a stone's throw away.

Inside, he found himself in a large room that took up all save a very small part of the ground floor of the cottage. To the left there was a wall, and in it an open door — he could see that much through the very faint light that filtered through the windows. Seemingly, he was in luck. There was absolutely nothing to make him doubt that he was alone in the house. Everything was still. There was not even the ticking of a clock, the one sound he might reasonably have expected to hear even in a temporarily deserted house. But he waited for quite a minute, to make sure that no one was about. He felt certain that, had anyone been there, he would have heard breathing, no matter how anxious the other occupant of the house might be to conceal his presence.

Then he switched on the light, shielding it with

his hand, so that no reflection of its faint glow should betray him, by means of the windows, to anyone approaching from outside.

About the big room in which he found himself there was nothing to excite suspicion at first sight. The room seemed ordinary enough; the usual living-room of a peasant. One thing was curious; he could see a trap door, evidently leading to a cellar below. But that he reserved for later inspection, preferring at first to look upstairs. He reached the second floor by the stairs; there, too, there seemed at first nothing out of the ordinary. But when he threw aside all scruples and looked everywhere, he found something that confirmed some at least of his suspicions — a bundle of letters, all written in German script. He did not stop to read the letters, but on the chance that they might contain something that would prove valuable or important, he slipped them into his pocket.

As yet, however, he had made no real discovery. The letters might prove a great deal; for the moment he was obliged to leave them unread, since

his time might prove to be very short. Down he went, light out, pausing in the big living-room to listen for some sound from the watcher outside. There was none.

Now he lifted the trap door, and found, as he had been sure he would, a ladder leading to the cellar below. He hesitated for a moment now. There seemed to be no safe way of propping up the trap door. To descend, closing it after him, meant that he would be shut into the cellar, where he could not hear the warning signal from Arthur, should it be sounded. But his hesitation lasted only a minute.

“It’s a chance, but I’ve got to take it,” he said to himself. “After all, I haven’t really found anything anywhere else. The cellar’s the last place to look — and the most likely, too.”

One thing was a relief; when he was safely down he could turn on his light, unafraid. From the cellar, without a window, with no means of egress save that by which he had entered it, there was no danger that a stray beam of light would betray his presence to the lawful dwellers in this cottage,

should they chance to return while he was there. And what he saw in the light when he switched it on was ample reward for his daring in braving the dangers of the place.

The place was an arsenal! Arranged against one wall were the parts of three powerful guns, all ready to be assembled. And all about, neatly stacked, were shells. He looked at them, pointing his light at them, to make sure. They bore the stamp of the Krupp works at Essen in Germany, the world-famous works whence the greater part of German munitions of war come.

Here was a discovery indeed! The Germans were ready to attack Liege. Of that there could no longer be even the shadow of a doubt. Not only had they prepared a place for the reception of guns; they had even smuggled the guns themselves over the border. It was, as he could see, not a matter of really great difficulty. The border was not far distant; the guards, on the Belgian side at least, had had no great reason in the past year or so to be especially vigilant. But Paul was hor-

rified by this proof of the determination of the great power to the east and north not to hesitate to invade Belgium, should that course be necessary to enable it to reach its most formidable antagonist, France.

There was something horrible and cold-blooded about such minute preparation. He was thrilled by his discovery. No less was he thrilled by the feeling that it was within his power now really to serve the land he loved. He was not old enough to be a soldier, but he felt that if he could get back to Liege with the information that he and Arthur had garnered that night they might serve Belgium as well as soldiers could do.

Light in hand, he made his way back to the ladder. Then he switched off the light and started to climb the ladder. And as he did so, he stopped, appalled. Above there was the sound of a closing door; then heavy footsteps sounded on the trap door over his head.

CHAPTER IV

THE FLIGHT

From his hiding place outside the cottage, Arthur had been watching faithfully while Paul explored the inside. He heard the steps that heralded the approach of a man, and whistled at once, imitating the cry of a quail, since he thought it better to take the chance of giving a false alarm than of letting his chum be trapped inside. But it was already too late, as it turned out. Paul had gone down into the cellar and let the door fall behind him. So Arthur's warning fell on deaf ears.

The steps came nearer, and Arthur, wondering why Paul did not appear, and only half guessing the reason, whistled louder. It was hard for him to refrain from dashing at once to the rescue. But after a moment's thought he realized that this would do Paul no good, and that it was all important for him to remain free, so that, if Paul was made a prisoner, he could carry the news to Liege

and so serve not only Belgium, but Paul, since that would be Paul's only chance of rescue. At least so it seemed then.

Now the man whose approach had alarmed Arthur came in sight. He was trudging along, looking like a veritable peasant. But now, in the light of the suspicions that had been aroused that day, Arthur could see things about this man that distinguished him from the Flemish dwellers in the neighborhood.

"He is a German!" he thought. "What shall I do?"

For the moment he could do literally nothing. He could only lie still and watch the man go up to the front door of the cottage and unlock it. But then, after the German had gone in, Arthur saw that there was still a light — a light that became visible as soon as the pretended peasant lighted his lamp. Plainly the door had not been quite closed; the little streak of light showed that.

Arthur waited breathlessly for some sign that Paul's presence had been discovered. But none

came. He was close enough to the door to hear the man in the cottage stamping about, and he could guess, of course, that Paul was concealed in some fashion. He had even the idea of the cellar but of course he could not be sure that Paul was not above — safe as long as it did not enter the German's head to climb the stairs. At any rate, Arthur was grateful for a respite, no matter how brief it might prove to be. Almost anything was better than the actual knowledge that his chum had been caught.

“While there's life, there's hope!” he said to himself, grimly.

But it was a good deal easier for him to determine that he would make some sort of effort to release his chum than it was for him to discover a practical way of doing so. He had the feeling that at any cost to Paul he must secure his own freedom; that was the thing that Paul had impressed most vividly on his mind. At last he determined to risk a trip to the window by which Paul had made his entrance. He wanted to look inside; to

see, at least, what was going on. Then some means of helping Paul might suggest itself.

Of course Arthur had seen nothing of the inside of the room, since it had been dark when Paul had climbed in. Now the first thing he saw after the man of the house himself, was the trap door that led to the cellar. He understood at once that Paul must be down there.

“That’s why he didn’t hear me, of course!” he said to himself. “Now to get him out!”

Suddenly, just as he was about to leave the window, Arthur was startled into a stiff and rigid halt by the sound of a heavy knock on the door of the cottage. The German inside, busy just then in cutting up a huge sausage that was evidently to be his dinner, seemed to be almost as startled as Arthur himself. He jumped up, upsetting his chair, and flung the door open. At once his whole manner changed. He started back, then stiffened himself and stood at attention. A young man, dressed in a uniform of a greenish-gray cloth that Arthur had never seen before, and covered now with dust,

walked in. Arthur could scarcely believe his eyes. Everything about the newcomer pointed to the fact that he was a German officer, for if the color of the uniform was unfamiliar, its cut was not. But a German officer in uniform here!

“Zu befehl, Herr Hauptmann!” said the man of the cottage.

“It’s come, Froebel,” said the captain. He stretched his arms, as if glad of the chance. “I’ve had a fine trip from Aachen! The worst roads I ever tried to push a motorcycle over! But I’m here — so that’s even! There are more coming. General von Emmich’s army is on the march already. We have even now taken possession of Luxembourg. To-night the Belgian government finally declined to give us the right to move our troops through their little toy country! So we must fight them, too.”

“I’m not sorry,” said Froebel. Some of the stiffness had gone out of his manner. “I’ll be glad to get a chance to do some fighting instead of this eternal spying! And who knows? If I am lucky,

I may get a little swifter promotion than I had hoped for."

"Oh, I forgot," said the other. "Congratulations, Froebel! You have your captaincy, and a staff detail. That's unofficial, of course. But I've seen the order."

"Good," said Froebel, impassively. "But if you stay with the line, Poertner, you'll be a colonel before I'm a major. Enough — to business! I have bad news."

"Bad news? What sort?"

"It's that clumsy fool Ridder! He has been mapping the whole field of operation here, as you know — details of the forts, and the location of all the concealed gun mountings and platforms we have put in in case the Belgians should be foolish enough to try to stop us by force."

"Yes, yes! What of it?"

"Eh? He had those papers — those simply invaluable papers! And he was alarmed by two Belgian boys in Boy Scout uniform — thought they were soldiers coming to arrest him! He took

to his heels and naturally, being boys, they followed! He dropped his papers going over a fence! When he missed them he went back. But he found no trace of them. He is sure that the two boys got them."

"Donnerwetter! That's a bad business, Froebel! I fear for our friend Ridder! The intelligence department will not be altogether pleased by this. But what if the boys have them? Is there a chance, do you think, that they will understand them?"

"Who knows? Some devil might lead them to take them to a Belgian officer! However — even so, there is this much of good about it. There is no time for them to do anything. They can't get at our gun platforms. If they had a week! But you say General von Emmich is already on the march? That means that war has been declared?"

"No, only that it has begun," said Poertner, with a smile. "It is no longer the fashion to declare war formally — unless the enemy is like Russia with us — so far away that we can't strike

first. No. The modern way is to begin fighting and let the other side declare war. So they seem to take the aggressive."

"I see," said Froebel. "Well, at any rate, it is the time I am thinking of. They are fairly well prepared here at Liege. The forts are in order; they have good men, and plenty of ammunition for their guns. But against our Krupp pieces — "

He laughed to express the chance that the stout forts of Liege were to have against the German artillery. And outside Arthur, listening, ground his teeth. He was glad that he had come; already he had learned facts likely to prove of the first importance. No matter how well the garrison of Liege was prepared for any emergency, it would be vastly helpful to know when the blow might be expected to fall. It is one thing to be prepared for a trouble that may come some day; it is quite another to know that it is imminent, and to make plans accordingly.

In Arthur's mind an idea now began to take root. The voices of the two Germans inside died

away, and he seized the opportunity to make his way quietly to the front of the cottage. There, lying on its side, was the motorcycle of which the new arrival had spoken. Arthur had ridden motorcycles himself, and now he went up to this one and examined it carefully. He found that while it was different from the ones he had ridden, the points of difference were really trifling and that he could understand it easily enough.

Then he went back for another peep in the window. The two German officers were busily engaged now in eating, and were washing down the sausage, amid a good deal of laughter at the rough fare, with two bottles of wine.

“When we have finished,” said Poertner, “we will have a look at your little arsenal below.”

“It’s a real arsenal,” said Froebel, proudly. “That was rather well managed, I think. We have managed to bring in the guns, one part at a time and the ammunition piecemeal, in the same way. These stupid Belgians never even suspected. It is only just lately that they have even begun to

dream that there might be danger for them if it came to war. Before they woke up everything was here!"

"Well, your guns will be at work before many hours if all goes well," said Poertner. "This sausage of yours is not so bad, after all! Food is food when you are hungry! Ah, it will be some time, at best, before we can eat again in Berlin, my friend!"

"Yes. There will be garrison work, even after we have taken Paris. Still, even so, it should not be so long. Three weeks perhaps—that should be enough to beat the French this time. We are better prepared than we were in 1870."

"So are they, I hear. Well, they couldn't be worse off than they were then! No matter, though — we shall outnumber them from the start. Will the English fight, do you think?"

"Pah — the English! No! They will be too busy with their troubles at home. They will have a rebellion on their hands in Ulster. No, England will have too many troubles of her own at home,

to be able to cross the sea to look for more."

Arthur had heard all he needed. Now he drew back from the window, picking up several good-sized stones as he did so. And when he was some distance away, but still able to see the two Germans, he stopped and waited.

He waited until the two officers had finished their meal and had risen. Even then he waited until they moved, together, to the trap door. Then, raising his arm, he let fly the first of his stones. It crashed through the window, shattering the glass. At once he threw another, and then still another. He had counted, and not in vain, on the instinct that would move the two Germans. With a single motion they leaped to the door. As they did so, even as they rushed out, he ran diagonally, so as to get away from them, toward the front of the house. As they stormed around in the direction from which he had thrown the stones, and so out of sight of the front of the house, he stopped. They passed within half a dozen feet of him, but, naturally, they had not expected him to come right

toward them, and they passed him unnoticed.

Then, as soon as they were out of sight, he made for the cottage. He meant to call Paul. But Paul was at the door as he reached it for he had understood, from what he had been able to hear, something of what had happened.

“Come on! Here’s a motorcycle we can take!” cried Arthur, eagerly.

He lifted the machine. In a moment he had started the motor, and Paul leaped up behind him as he got it going.

“Hurry! Here they come!” shouted Paul.

The put-put of the motor had aroused the Germans to what was going on. Now they stormed back around the cottage. They were just in time to see the motorcycle being ridden madly off; in time, too, to fire a couple of shots apiece from their pistols. But their aim was bad; the boys heard the bullets whistling over their heads. In less than a minute they were safe!

CHAPTER V

PURSUIT

They had no thought of any further danger, as they sped along the road on the stolen — or, rather, the captured motorcycle. The road was smooth and good. There was nothing to detain them. Behind them the furious shouts of the Germans, even the firing, died away, until the only sound they could hear was the noise of the engine. The machine was a good one, evidently built for the hard work of an army in the field.

Before them now was the searchlight from Fort Boncelles, picking up one patch of darkness after another, flooding it suddenly with light, and then passing on to the next, swinging about endlessly in a great arc, so that the slightest movement that was out of the ordinary was sure to be seen. From time to time the great beam of light struck the road, before them or behind them. Then they were in the midst of it, riding in a sea of light. The

searchlight winked off, came back to them, and went with them for nearly half a mile.

“They’ve spotted us, Arthur!” said Paul, with a laugh. “Well, I hope they’re not frightened!”

“They must want to make sure of what we’re doing, I suppose, Paul! Look at the other lights! It’s a great sight when they all swing up together, isn’t it?”

From the forts that ringed the ancient city the darting searchlights swept the heavens. At times all of them met, for a moment, making a blinding reflection against the sky. They would stay thus; then, one after another, the lights would go swooping down, keeping their vigil. Behind each were watchful eyes, ready to report immediately the first, the slightest sign of what might come now at any moment.

“Those searchlights make the idea of war seem more real than anything else has, Paul,” said Arthur.

Paul gave a short laugh.

“If you’d seen those shells and the parts of the

guns, all ready to be put together in that cellar, you wouldn't say that!" he exclaimed. "And how about the German officer — in uniform, on the soil of a friendly country? That's almost an act of war itself, Arthur! He has no business here!"

"I don't see what difference it makes, Paul. If they're coming, there'll be so many more that one more or less won't count."

"Well, they're coming! I'm more sure of that than ever since we found that house. I say, Arthur, I think you'd better stay right out here in the road with the motorcycle, while I run in and get the plans. If we both went, we might be caught — and I don't want to have to explain anything until we've told what we know to the staff officers."

"All right, Paul. But don't be long."

"I won't! Here we are! Now you wait — and I'll get back just as soon as I can."

It was an easy matter, as it turned out, for Paul to slip into the grounds and retrieve the plans. But it took time, and time, had he only known it, was

the one thing he could not afford to waste just then. Somehow neither he nor Arthur had given a further thought to the two Germans they had so cleverly eluded in the mysterious cottage. They had felt that these two enemies, at least, might be counted out for that night.

And so Paul, returning to the spot where he had left Arthur, took no particular pains to conceal himself. He called out as he vaulted the low wall between the grounds of his uncle's place and the road.

“It was easy!” he cried. “No one was about. They’re probably so excited that they haven’t even missed us yet! Start your engine! We’ve got to hurry now.”

Arthur tried to obey. But there was some slight hitch in the starting of the engine. Then the spark worked, and the motor began to throb. The cycle started; Paul leaped up to his place behind. And then, behind them, came a sudden roar, the sound of another motorcycle, and a flash of light swept over them.

“Stop!” cried a voice—a voice they knew! It was one of the Germans!

“Go on! Hurry!” cried Paul. “Perhaps we can get away from them—we’re ahead, anyhow!”

The motorcycle leaped forward now, but from behind they could still hear the barking of the exhaust of the other machine, and the excited cries of the Germans. Luck was with them, however, for just at that most critical of moments something must have gone wrong with the pursuing machine. The noise of its motor ceased behind them. The shouting continued, but only one voice was raised. Plainly the other man was busy. While their luck held, Arthur pushed the machine at the best speed he could get out of it. And it was well that he did, since the trouble with the other motor was soon mended. It sprang into sputtering life again behind them. But now they had a good lead and were racing on toward the forts, toward the circle of wide swinging search-lights.

"How are we getting on, Paul?" asked Arthur.

"Are we gaining?"

"I'm afraid — no, we're not. They're coming along awfully fast. That must be a much more powerful machine than this."

"I don't think it's that. I'm awfully afraid that our gasoline is running low! That German must have ridden a long way. Probably he expected to fill his tank back there! There's so much noise that I'm not sure, but I'm afraid one cylinder is missing. That's what is making us slower."

Over their heads now a bullet sang out sharply. There could be no doubt about it at all, now; the other motorcycle was rapidly making up lost ground. Then while they still raced on, and when the other machine was less than a hundred yards behind, the whole road was paved in light again, as the Boncelles searchlight swung around and down, and was focused full on the chase.

Still the other cycle gained, but there were no more shots. The reason for that was made

plain in a few moments by a call to surrender.

“They’re only boys!” one of the Germans had yelled to the other. “We can catch them. Don’t let’s hurt them.”

And then, with the distance between the two machines being reduced every minute, they could hear one of the Germans shouting to them.

“Stop! Surrender!” he cried. “You can’t escape — we’re gaining all the time! If you stop now, you won’t be hurt!”

Then the searchlight swung away, and in that same moment Paul had an inspiration. He remembered that in his pocket was a glass flask that had contained water. He took this out now, and broke it against the steel frame of the motorcycle. The fragments cut his fingers, but he ignored the cuts and the flow of blood. At the risk of hurting himself still more, he broke the fragments again in his hand. Then he began dropping the sharp pieces of glass. And in a minute he had his reward. From behind came two sharp explosions, and looking back, he saw the other motorcycle

swerve and fall. The two riders went sprawling.

“Get all you can out of her, Arthur!” he shouted. “I spilled them. The glass punctured both their tires! That was luck! It won’t stop them for long, but it’s given us a little more time. I don’t believe they’ll put on new tires, even if they’re carrying them. And if they don’t, it will make them much slower. You can’t go so fast on rims as you can on rubber tires!”

“That was fine! I never thought of doing that!” exclaimed Arthur. “I do believe it’s going to save us, too. We can’t be more than a mile and a half from Boncelles now.”

“We’ll get there — unless our gasoline gives out altogether before that, Arthur. And it may. The engine is certainly missing all the time, now. Oh, if it will only hold out!”

Their speed was greatly reduced now. And from behind the other motor started again.

“I admire those Germans!” said Paul. “A good many people wouldn’t keep at it the way they’re doing. It’s no joke to ride on a motorcycle with

both tires gone. They'll remember to-night for some time, I think! They'll be sore and shaken to pieces before they're done."

"They'll be better off than their machine," said Arthur, philosophically. "There won't be enough of that left to sell for junk if they ride it very far in that condition."

"Well, I don't believe they'll care about that, if they only catch us and get the plans—"

It was a sudden lurch of the machine, accompanied by a sputtering and a stopping of the motor, that interrupted him. The two scouts sprang off just in time, steadying the machine.

"Drop it! Into the fields here!" cried Paul. "We can't run any longer. We must try to elude them by tricking them. Come on!"

And so they were obliged to abandon the machine that had served them so well, leaving it lying in the road. They ran across a ditch that bordered the road, and into a field where they managed to conceal themselves in a hedge. They could still see the white road, and the collapsed motor-

cycle, but there was a chance, even if it was a slim one, that they themselves would not be seen.

Arthur wanted to run across the field, but Paul stopped him.

“That’s what they’ll expect us to do, isn’t it?” he said. “And, besides, they could see us. There’s no shelter for a long way. Here they may overlook us, just because we’re so close — and it’s the only chance we have, anyhow.”

“Here they come!” cried Arthur, and crouched down, staring. For a moment it seemed that the pursuers might ride straight by, and Paul groaned suddenly.

“We ought to have dragged the machine in here with us!” he said. “Then I don’t believe they’d have known we had stopped for quite a distance! I never thought of it, though, and now it’s too late!”

It was too late, indeed, for the other machine stopped within a few feet of the overturned cycle.

“Ha! Now we’ll have them! They can’t have gone far!” said one of the Germans. “Accursed

boys! They have given me a fright!"

"You haven't caught us yet!" whispered Paul, defiantly.

It was true, as the Germans soon discovered. For when they began looking for the two boys, they found that it was one thing to know that they must be somewhere about, and quite another to find out just where. They did not begin to look immediately in the field, but went along the road, toward Liege, evidently looking for footprints. Then when they did take to the field, they crossed the ditch fully a hundred yards further along the road.

"Come on!" said Paul, suddenly. "We got one of their machines — why shouldn't we take the other?"

Arthur saw the point as quickly as Paul. The carelessness of the two Germans had once more given them an opportunity. In a moment they dashed out, and, just as the Germans, with a yell of fury, saw them, they were off. Bullets flew about them, but they bent low over the machine,

and they were going fast. Still two bullets found their mark, one puncturing the rear tire, the other perforating the gasoline tank. Once more they seemed to be caught. And then a searchlight swept down upon them again. But this time it was not the great light from Boncelles. It was the huge headlight of an automobile, and behind it they saw an armored car. Soldiers sprang from it, and in a moment the tables had been completely turned.

It was the two German officers who were made prisoners, while officers eagerly pressed about the scouts, asking question upon question.

“I must be taken to General Leman at once,” said Paul, stoutly. “We have information of the utmost importance.”

The Belgian officers laughed at him at first. But he was so earnest and persistent that he had his way at last.

CHAPTER VI

AT HEADQUARTERS

The armored automobile, a queer looking affair with its machine guns and its steel parapets, pierced with holes through which rifles could be fired, made good time on the way back to Liege. It was really a fairly large motor lorry, converted very readily from a commercial use to its new purpose, and even the untrained eyes of the two scouts could see that it was likely to prove a formidable weapon in time of war.

“It would take a heavy gun to stop it. Rifle fire wouldn’t bother us at all, you see,” explained one of the Belgian officers. “Even the driver is thoroughly protected, because he could only be shot from above. I expect we’ll have a lot of use for these.”

“Are there many of them?”

“Not so many here. We don’t need them. But at Brussels, where the field army is being mo-

bilized now, there are a lot, and all through the open country where there will probably be a good deal of fighting."

"Will the Germans get so far?"

"They're sure to. We'll hold Liege with a small force as long as we can. But you must remember that they can send a million men against us! We're not supposed to beat them — no one expects us to do that. All we have to do is to hold them back as long as possible."

"But if there are so many of them, why can't they go right around us here?"

"They can, and they probably will. But even so, they'll have to account for the fortress of Liege and of Namur, as well, before they can get so very far."

"That's what I don't quite understand," said Arthur. "It seems to me that unless we have soldiers enough here to stop them they could go right on without bothering about Liege at all."

"You haven't studied strategy yet, I can see, my scout!" said the officer, with a laugh. "But

I'll try to explain. You see, the Germans want to reach France — to conquer the French army and capture Paris, as they did in 1870. Then they went right through Alsace and Lorraine — beat the French around Metz, locked up the beaten army in that fortress, beat the only other army France had and captured it at Sedan, and then walked right through to Paris."

"Yes, I've read of that," said Arthur. "They didn't go through Belgium then, either."

"They didn't have to. But since then, you see, the French have learned their lesson. They've got the most powerful fortified line in the world, I suppose, all the way from Belfort to Verdun. It would take the Germans weeks to break through there, and by that time the whole French army would be mobilized behind that line of fortresses, and ready for them. If they were only fighting France they might try it. But now they've got to fight France and Russia too. And the only chance they have is to beat France even more quickly than they did in 1870. I happen to know that their

plans require them to capture Paris within six weeks.”

“Six weeks! Do you think they can do it?”

“No! Not if we do our part! And if they don’t, they’re likely to fail altogether. Because then Russia will have had time to mobilize, and more than half of the German army will have to help the Austrians to hold back the Russians from Vienna and Berlin. What they’re counting on, you see, is smashing France, so that they can hold only a few corps back on this side, and throw all the rest of their army against Russia. Then they’d have a chance — more than a chance.”

“But still I don’t understand about Liege yet, and why it’s so important,” said Arthur.

“I’m coming to that. Now, to get at the French, they’ve got to go through Belgium. Well, they’ve got to supply their armies. They’ve got to send guns, and ammunition, and food from Germany. To do that they have to keep their line of communication open. Liege is right on one of their important lines of communication — the one that

really starts at Aix-la-Chapelle, just across the border. Liege, if it wasn't reduced, or at least 'masked' — that means surrounded — would threaten these communications all the time. We could raid the railway, for instance. And if communications are interrupted, even for a day or so, it may mean the loss of a battle. They use a frightful lot of ammunition, for instance, in a modern battle. And if troops didn't get their supplies, they might be crushed utterly. That's why we'll hold them back."

Meanwhile the armored car was approaching Liege. And now they were near the old citadel, where, as both the scouts knew, General Leman had established his headquarters.

"I don't know whether the General will see you," said a captain, doubtfully. "But you can see one of his staff, anyway. Won't that do? He can decide whether what you have is important."

"Yes, and I think he'll take us to the General when he hears our story," said Paul. "But please hurry! There really isn't any time to be lost."

“I’ll speak to Major du Chaillu,” promised the captain. “I think he’ll be able to arrange matters for you.”

After a short delay, Major du Chaillu, a tall, harassed looking man, under whose eyes there were great, dark circles as if he had not slept for many weary hours, received them in his office. He was busy with a great map of Liege and the surrounding forts, on which he was arranging and rearranging many small flags.

“Now tell me briefly what you have discovered,” he said, his manner quick and abrupt. It was plain that exhaustion had made him nervous.

“We have found out that the Germans have secretly prepared foundations for heavy guns all around Liege, sir,” said Paul, quietly.

“What?” The major spun around and stared at them.

Paul repeated the statement, and produced the packet of papers they had gone through so much to retain.

“We didn’t know what these marks meant,” he

explained. "So we decided to try to find out. And when we reached the place that was marked on this map we found not only a concrete and steel foundation for a big gun, but some smaller guns, all ready to be assembled and a store of ammunition."

"Tell me exactly what happened," said du Chaillu. But already he was comparing the sketch maps Paul had given him with his own big wall map, and was using his compasses and other instruments to determine ranges and distances. His eyes were shining, too. Busy as he was, however, he listened attentively.

"That was well done — well done, indeed!" he said, heartily. "You will hear more of this, I promise you, and from those whose praise will mean more than anything I can say. I shall take you at once to General Leman, although there are positive orders that he is not to be disturbed."

And so in a few minutes they found themselves in the presence of the heroic defender of Liege, the kindly faced, middle aged general who was to win

a European, a world-wide reputation, indeed, in the course of the next few days. He heard du Chaillu's report; then he questioned both the scouts.

"You have served Belgium well to-day," he said, finally. "I shall report your conduct to His Majesty the King. Major, see to it that these boys reach their homes in safety, and if an escort is needed, or any other help, to enable them and their relatives to reach a place of safety, supply it. I shall see you again, I hope, my boys!"

"What we discovered will really prove useful, then?" asked Paul, when, with the major, they had left General Leman.

"Useful?" exclaimed the major. "Eh — but yes! Listen! What you have found is the location of all the heavy guns that will soon be thundering at our brave forts. Now we shall know just where those guns are. We can give the gunners the exact range, the exact spot at which to drop their shells. We shall put their heavy pieces out of business. Do you see? If you had not brought us

this word we might have wasted many shots trying to do that. We should have sent up aeroplanes, we should have guessed by the smoke and the reports just where their guns were placed. But now we need not guess; we need risk nothing to learn the truth. We know it in advance."

"I was hoping there would be time to send men to destroy such places as we found," said Arthur.

"There might be time, but it is far better not to do so, you see," said the major. "As it is, we could destroy only the mountings. But if we wait until their guns are in position, we can smash the guns as well. It may well be that you have dealt a blow to Germany to-night more severe than the loss of a battle and fifty thousand men would be!"

"I hope so!" said Arthur, vindictively. "They have no business coming into peaceful Belgium, which asks only to be left alone!"

The major laughed a little bitterly.

"That is true," he said. "But our poor Belgium! They call her the cockpit of Europe, for whenever there is a general war, it is here in Bel-

gium and in Flanders, both French and Belgian, that the fighting is at its fiercest, it seems. Marlborough fought Louis the Fourteenth here; it was near Brussels that Wellington crushed Napoleon. Blood and fire have been known in Belgium always. But perhaps after this war our neutrality will no longer be but a word. It may be that we shall be able to cease to think of danger then."

Outside there was a sudden bustle. Officers were running about, forgetful of their dignity. From the room in which they had left General Leman there was a constant double stream of officers and orderlies, one going in, the other coming out. Major du Chaillu looked startled.

"There must be something new!" he said.
"Wait for me a minute — I will find out."

When he returned his face was very grave.

"A German army corps has occupied Luxembourg, against the formal protest of the Grand Duchess Marie Adelaide," he said. "And Belgian soil has felt the footprints of armed Germans at last! What we have known must come has come!"

The German invasion of Belgium has begun!"

"That means war," said Paul.

"Yes. I am afraid that we shall be fighting them within twenty-four hours. They will move swiftly. You had better hasten back to your home. If there are no men left there you may be badly needed."

"Very well, sir," said Paul. "I hope, though, that we may be of some service during the defence, after we have done what is necessary for my aunt."

"We shall see as to that later," said du Chaillu. "You have been of the greatest service to Belgium already. I shall order an escort for you."

"Please don't," said Paul. "We can get along all right. There can be no danger now. And I believe that every man in the garrison here will be needed."

"Well—" Du Chaillu hesitated. "Perhaps you are right. I myself cannot see of what use an armed escort can be to you. There is not the slightest real chance of any trouble between here

and your home. Good luck to you — and may we meet again in a time when our anxieties and our fears for our country shall be at an end!"

"Good-bye, sir, and thank you!" said Paul and Arthur together.

In the town they got bicycles at a place where they were well known. Du Chaillu had given them the countersign, and they needed it near Boncelles, since they were challenged. They rode swiftly along, and as they neared the house, they saw a bright glare in the sky.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRE

“That’s from a fire, Paul!” said Arthur. “And it looks — ”

“As if it came from Uncle Henri’s house? It certainly does, Arthur! Oh, but I hope it isn’t! That would be dreadful!”

They raced on now, and as they hastened, the sky before them grew ever brighter. They could no longer doubt that the glare they saw came from a conflagration, and it grew more and more certain every minute that it was their own summer home that was burning. There was no other house in that direction that would produce such a splendid reflection were it afire.

And soon, too, they came in sight of the house, and all hope that they were mistaken vanished. It was M. de Frenard’s house, and a single glance showed that there was no hope of saving it. Flames were spurting from every window, and

through the roof, even as they came into plain sight of the house, there burst a great pillar of fire. There seemed to be an explosion of some sort, for a great mass of sparks shot upward toward the heavens, raining down a moment later. In the light of the fire they could see the men-servants and some of the peasant neighbors busily engaged in dragging a few pieces of furniture and some pictures across the lawn — evidently what little there had been time to drag from the burning house. They could see also a group of women, where Madame de Frenard was calming the women-servants and trying to bring order out of chaos.

Dropping their bicycles, they ran quickly toward her, calling her name. As she heard them she turned, and they saw that her face was radiant.

“Oh, you are safe, then!” she cried. “Now nothing else matters, since no one is hurt! No one had seen you two since dinner — I was so frightened!”

“We’re all right,” said Paul, a little remorse-

ful. "There was something we had to do, that I will tell you about later. But how did this fire start?"

"No one knows," said Madame de Frenard, her eyes darkening. "All that is certain is that we were awakened by a cry of fire. There was scarcely time for all of us to get out, and for the men to save a few of the best pictures. It seemed that oil must have been spread about, for the fire to burn so quickly! I do not believe it was an accident."

Paul and Arthur looked at one another. The same thought had come to both of them. It was Arthur who voiced it.

"The Germans?" he said, doubtfully.

"Just what I was wondering," said Paul. "But why should they?"

"Oh, I thought of them, too!" said their aunt. "And I, too, asked why. There is war but, even so, we have nothing to do with that. There is no reason for them to burn our home!"

"I think a great many things are going to hap-

pen for which it will be hard to find a reason,'" said Paul, thoughtfully.

"Well, the first thing to be done is for us to get a roof over our heads for to-night," said Madame de Frenard, with decision. "Your uncle is still in Brussels, unless he has already rejoined the army. I think we had better go into Liege and stay at a hotel."

"We can get into Liege," said Paul, rousing himself from his mood of reflection, "but I'm not sure about staying there. I think you had better take your maid and go to Brussels, Aunt Claire. The rest of the servants ought to go home, I think."

It was curious to see how their positions were reversed in this emergency. It was Paul who was in command now, not his aunt.

"Do you think so?" she said. "Why, Paul?"

"Because I am afraid that there will be hard fighting around Liege. I do not think the town will be defended for very long; it cannot be. It is supposed only to check the German advance, to gain

a little time, so that the French and the English, if they come to our aid, may have time to mass their troops to the west and the north. I am sure Uncle Henri would say I was right, and I can arrange it for you to be sent to Brussels, I am sure.”

Madame de Frenard was a little inclined to smile, in spite of the fire and all the woe it had brought with it.

“Why, Paul, how can you arrange anything?” she asked. “Have you, perhaps, suddenly acquired influence with the army?”

“He certainly has!” interrupted Arthur, his eyes shining. “Oh, Aunt Claire, we’ve done so many wonderful things to-night!”

So he let the cat out of the bag, and, with so much of a start, Madame de Frenard was not satisfied until she had the whole story out of them. She caught her breath when she heard of the shots that had been fired at them, but she looked very proud and happy, too.

“Oh, that was splendid!” she cried. “We may

be a little nation, we Belgians, but we can meet them when even our boys can defy them and outwit them so magnificently! Now I know that I can trust you! Paul, it is as if your uncle were here! You shall take his place, and I shall do whatever you say is right."

Paul grew red, and embarrassment checked his speech for a moment.

"It was just luck, of course," he said, confusedly. "Anyone could have done what we did, you know. But I'm glad you'll go on to Brussels, Aunt Claire, and I think Major du Chaillu will be glad to make the arrangements, before the railway is interrupted. I will go now and get out the carriages."

"Very well, Paul, do so. It is lucky that we have those left, at any rate."

Paul and Arthur helped the men to get out the carriages and harness the horses, frightened by the noise and confusion of the fire. And Paul and Arthur, too, rode in the carriage that took their aunt and her maid into Liege.

"I didn't think we would be coming back to Liege quite so soon," said Arthur, a little ruefully. "This isn't as exciting as the first trip we made to-night, either."

"No, but I think it's safer," said Paul, rather dryly. "And there'll be more than enough excitement to make up for it when the Germans come, Arthur."

"Oh, I suppose so!"

"I am going to take you two boys to Brussels with me," said Madame de Frenard, suddenly.

Paul was quiet at that; it was Arthur who cried out in vigorous protest.

"Oh, no, Aunt Claire!" he exclaimed. "'There's so much for us to do here!'"

"There will be plenty for you to do in Brussels," she said, with decision. "It's settled. I can't allow you to stay here if it isn't safe for me."

Arthur looked to Paul for help, but Paul only smiled. His aunt looked at him curiously.

"So you are willing to go without arguing, Paul!" she asked.

"You said it was settled, Aunt Claire," he replied. "If a thing is settled, there is no use in arguing about it, is there?"

She smiled faintly. She knew Paul well enough to know that when his mind was made up he never was willing to admit that a thing was settled until it was settled as he wished. She wondered what he had up his sleeve, for she was sure that he was quite as anxious as Arthur to stay in or around Liege.

As a matter of fact, Paul was the only one of them all who had even a remote idea of what was coming. He could not foresee all the horrors of invasion and battle. No one can do that, or wars would never be begun. But he did realize that dire trouble was in store, and that a good many civilians, and especially women and young children, would be sent away from Liege before there was any fighting, if that were possible. There was something else that Paul grasped better than either Arthur and his aunt, and that was the probable course of the invasion.

He knew that in a few days Liege, strong fortress though it was, would be engulfed. It might hold out for a long time; he thought it probably would. But the Germans would be all about it. The Uhlans would sweep along, far beyond the range of the guns of the forts, cutting communications, interrupting railways, blocking the roads, and Liege must depend upon itself for food, for ammunition, for all the things that would be needed. For that reason, he thought, General Leman would encourage all who could to get out of the city before the actual siege began. And he had an idea that there was no real question of his going, or Arthur; that they would have to wait their turn, at least. That was why he submitted so quietly to his aunt's declaration that he and Arthur were to go with her.

When they arrived in Liege he found that, late as it was, the city was still awake and stirring. Outside of the railway station there was a great crowd. There were women there with children clinging to their skirts. They carried odd-shaped

bundles. Plainly this was a sudden flight for most of them, and they had snatched up their greatest treasures, and wrapped them as best they could.

"Why, it looks like a regular panic!" said Madame de Frenard. "I don't see what there is to be afraid of yet, at any rate. I don't see how we are going to get away, either, Paul."

"I'll try to find Major du Chaillu," said Paul. "Arthur, will you stay here while I go?"

He went off when Arthur nodded, and threaded his way through the confusion and the crowds to General Leman's headquarters. There, after a good deal of difficulty, and after he had been turned away several times by impatient sentries, he succeeded in finding his friend the major. To him he explained the situation.

"Your aunt and her maid?" said du Chaillu. "Yes, I shall be able to manage that."

"My cousin and I cannot go, I suppose?"

"Not to-night, I'm afraid, my boy. The orders are very strict." He looked a little puzzled, but went on: "I'd like to make an exception in your

case, for you have done so much for Belgium—”

“Oh, I don’t want to go and neither does Arthur!” cried Paul, with a laugh. “It’s just as I thought. Only my aunt wants us to go, and I was afraid that perhaps we could.”

The major laughed, too.

“That’s more like what I had expected from you,” he said. “Yet it would be better if you did go. However, women and children first. We’ve made the rule, and we must make no exceptions, or it would be impossible to enforce it at all.”

“Oh, we’ll get along all right,” said Paul. “And—well, I have an idea that may not be of any use, so that I’d better not say anything about it yet. But I hope that Paul and I can still do something for Belgium and Liege.”

“I’ve no doubt that you will try to do that,” said du Chaillu. “Come, show me where you left your aunt, and I will see that she is allowed to go out on the next train. I will take her into the station by a private entrance for there is little chance of getting through the crowd in any other way.”

He was as good as his word. Madame de Frenard listened to his explanation of how impossible it was for Paul and Arthur to be allowed to go on the train, and glanced at Paul. She thought that she understood his submissiveness better now!

“But — women and children?” she said.
“Surely these boys?”

“We are not children!” protested Paul and Arthur, in one breath.

Major du Chaillu smiled rather sadly.
“No, they are not children in such times as these, Madame,” he said. “We have not quite come to the point of calling upon boys to fight, but we cannot treat them as children. Still, I shall see that they are looked to, as well as I can, be assured of that, Madame de Frenard.”

And with that assurance she had to be content.

CHAPTER VIII

THE UHLAN

“Come along with me,” said du Chaillu, when they had left Madame de Frenard in the station. “I’ll see that you’re put up for the rest of the night, and to-morrow we’ll make other arrangements.”

“Thank you,” said Paul, “but I think we’d better go back. A good many things were saved, after all, when the house was burned. When so much was destroyed I think we ought to try to safeguard what remains, for my uncle’s sake. And there is a place there where we can sleep very well, thank you.”

“H’m!” Du Chaillu looked more than doubtful. “But there is no telling how soon the Germans will be there. Had you thought of that?”

“They won’t hurt us, sir,” said Paul.

“No, I suppose not. There’s no reason for them to make war on boys or any other non-com-

batants. One word of warning, though. If the Germans do come before you can get away again, don't make any move against them. All the fighting must be done by soldiers. The Germans consider it is murder if a civilian fires on them, and they are in the right, according to the rules of war. They are justified in making any reprisals. So be careful yourselves, and warn all the men about your place. Tell them the message is from me. General Leman has issued orders that no civilians are to oppose the Germans or give them any excuse for destroying undefended places."

"I understand, sir," said Paul. "Then we may go?"

"Yes. But be careful. We have seen aeroplanes of the Germans already — one of our flyers chased one of their Taubes early in the evening. They dropped bombs on Fort Boncelles."

"I never thought of that!" exclaimed Arthur, sharply. "Do you suppose one of their aeroplanes could have dropped a bomb that would have set our house afire?"

"It is possible," said du Chaillu, shortly. "They might not have realized what they were doing. I hope they did not, if that is what happened. It is not the sort of work for soldiers."

"It makes very little difference now," said Paul. "The house is burned, so it doesn't matter, I suppose, how it came to catch fire. We will go back, then, major."

"Very well. Report to me at headquarters here when you return, although by that time I may be on duty in one of the forts. I cannot tell; we of the staff are in one place one minute, and far away the next. Good-night, again, and better luck, this time, than my wishes brought you before."

"Good-night!" they echoed, and set out to find their carriage. But before they reached it Paul stopped.

"I want to go to Henri Creusot's house," he said. "There is something in the stable there we shall need. I suppose we can't wake him up, but I shall get what I want, even if we cannot."

Arthur followed him willingly, although Paul

volunteered no explanation of what it was that he was after. And he remained on guard outside the stable while Paul went in, to reappear presently with a large and cumbrous burden — a sack bulging with the spoil of his little raid. Then they went to the carriage, and soon they were driving back toward the ruined house. When they reached it the dawn was beginning to break in the east — toward Germany! It was a red, menacing dawn — the sort of daybreak one might well have expected to see in such a time. About the smouldering remains of the fine house the men employed about the place were still grouped. It seemed all had decided that in some mysterious fashion the Germans were responsible for the ruin that had been wrought, and they were talking sullenly of what they meant to do to the enemy.

Paul gave quick directions for housing and hiding the pictures and the few fine pieces of furniture that had been saved. When all that he ordered had been done there seemed a good chance that what the flames had spared would be safe

from further risk. Then he and Arthur went over to look at the garage, which had not been touched by the fire.

“This is a piece of good luck, anyhow,” said Paul, when he found the little building untouched. “I think we’ll live here as long as the Germans will let us, Arthur, which probably won’t be very long, even if we pretend to be stupid. We can be mighty comfortable.”

“Of course we can,” said Arthur. “It will be like a picnic, or like camping out, won’t it?”

“I’m afraid it won’t,” said Paul. “But we’ll make the best of it, anyway. Come along to the house. I think the ruins are cool enough for us to find out what I want to know.”

He led the way and Arthur followed. But it was not to the house that Paul went first. Instead, he led the way to a post that had carried the telephone wire, and, finding the wire, began to follow it toward the wing where it had entered the house.

“What on earth are you looking at that telephone wire for?” asked Arthur, completely mys-

tified. "It seems to me that that's the least important thing there is left."

"I think it's going to be about the most important thing!" said Paul, surprisingly. "Go get a shovel, will you? Or rather two, for we've got some digging to do."

Arthur obeyed, as he always did, but he was thoroughly mystified. And no light was shed upon the mystery when he returned, to find that Paul had disconnected the wire in the ruins of the house and was dragging it away from the post where it entered the grounds. But now Paul explained.

"Do you remember that several of the crosses on those maps we found were right over there?" he asked, pointing in a direction east of the burned house.

"Y—es," said Arthur, with an effort to remember. "Oh, yes, I do, now!"

"Well, that means that there will be a battery there. Do you see how it's screened? The woods hide it completely. It doesn't make any difference

to the Germans that they can't see their target — they've got a fixed range, because they know just where the forts are, and they'll get the range of anything else from their aeroplanes.”

“Yes, I see that.”

“Well, I think this battery is likely to turn out to be the most important one on this side. I think that they will depend on it to silence Boncelles and Embourg. We haven't many aeroplanes and it's going to be mighty hard for our people in the forts to tell what the effect of their shell fire is, and to correct the range, especially if the Germans use comparatively light guns that they can move about, as I think they will. Now do you see?”

“Not quite —”

“Suppose we stay here in the garage? There's a chance that they may let us, isn't there? Well, if they do, we can see whatever goes on, with a little care. And if we have a buried telephone wire leading to Boncelles we can report just what happens when a shell is fired, and they can correct their aim. That's why I want to dig a trench

for that wire from some distance outside the grounds here, and run it under the garage — into the pit, you know.”

“Oh, now I see! You mean we would stay here and pretend not to have any idea of what’s going on, while we were really sending information to the forts?”

“Yes. Now the first thing we’ve got to do is to tap that wire and tell them in Liege what we are doing, so that they can give us direct connection with Boncelles. Then we’ll try to hide the wire, so that the Germans won’t find it.”

Now the mysterious errand Paul had had in Liege was explained. He had brought with him all he thought he could use of a lot of wire and telephone instruments that one of their fellow scouts had used in setting up a miniature telephone exchange of his own, with wires connecting his house with that of some of his chums.

“We’d better dig the trench and bury the wire first because we’ve got to be very careful in filling it up again, so that no one will notice what’s been

done," said Paul. "That's the most important part. You see, if we were caught at this we'd be treated as spies—and that's what we'll really be."

"Isn't there a chance that they won't really come as far as this?" asked Arthur.

"Yes, there is and a very good chance, too, I think. Really, if they do come up to this point, I believe we won't have much chance. But the grounds here will be well within the range of the guns from the forts, and I don't think they'll do any infantry work until they've tried to beat down our forts with their big guns. Not from this side, anyway. If they try to take Liege by storm they're more likely to attack between Liers and Pontisse, or between the Meuse and Barchon. The country's more open there. Here, you see, the Ourthe runs between Boncelles and Embourg, and the two forts command all the approaches. So I think there's a good chance for us. But we have got to take precautions, of course, because they are almost sure to throw out their scouts as

far as this in the beginning, even if they recall them after the guns start firing."

Neither of the scouts thought of being tired after that. Arthur began the work of digging out the shallow trench in which they meant to bury the wire, while Paul tapped the main wire and explained to an officer at headquarters in Liege what they planned. It took him some time to overcome the doubts of this officer, but finally it was arranged that his wire should be connected with Fort Boncelles direct, and he talked to that important link in the chain of defending forts for some time, making final arrangements.

"No matter what happens, of course," he said, "you mustn't call us, because if we're quiet for any length of time, it may mean that the Germans are around us. We will watch the firing, after it begins, and tell you whatever we can find out."

Then he returned to help Arthur, and they worked until it was broad daylight. By that time they had the wire well hidden, so that it was entirely invisible. It came out under the garage,

and the instrument at its end was well concealed in the pit under the place where the big car stood when repairs were to be made.

“Well, that’s done!” Paul exclaimed at last, with a deep sigh of satisfaction. “Are you tired, Arthur?”

“I wasn’t just a minute ago,” said Arthur, rubbing his eyes. “But now I’m so sleepy that I feel as if I could go off standing up!”

“Well, there’s no reason why we shouldn’t get some sleep now. I’m like you. As long as we still had something to do I didn’t feel tired. But now —”

A great yawn interrupted him. They surveyed their work with blinking eyes, then they crept up to the little room above the garage, and in less than a minute were sound asleep.

It was broad daylight when they went asleep; when they awoke dusk had fallen. Paul woke first, and he went to the window and looked out. Everything, seemingly, was just as it had been when they had last looked out. The scene was one

of profound peace. From the window he could not see the burned house, a patch of blackened ruin in the fair landscape. The fading light played on the leaves just as it had a thousand times before; shadows lay along the little mossy patches, the corners of the lawns that he knew so well.

“Wake up, Arthur!” he said, turning to his chum.

He had to shake Arthur before he could arouse him.

“It isn’t time to get up yet — it’s still dark, Paul,” protested Arthur, sleepily. But then he began to recover his wits, and he dragged himself up, and went with Paul to the window. For a few moments they were quiet, listening.

“Perhaps they’re not coming — perhaps it’s all a false alarm. I don’t hear any guns.”

“Look!” said Paul, gripping him suddenly by the shoulder. He pointed to the road. Against the sky stood a horse, on its back a silent rider with a spiked helmet, in his hand a long lance.

A German Uhlan!

CHAPTER IX

WAR

“They’ve come, then!” said Paul. “That means war. Look at his uniform — I never saw a German soldier looking like that before.”

It was true. The uniform seemed to melt into the landscape; it was indeterminate, greenish gray in color. Even the spike of the helmet did not catch the rays of the sinking sun; it was covered with the dull, neutral colored cloth.

“I hope he isn’t going to stay there,” said Arthur. Their voices had sunk to whispers. Though there was no chance that the vidette would hear them, his very presence had the effect of quieting them. There was a tremendous difference, somehow, between thinking of an invasion, between realizing that it was inevitable that German troops should pour into Belgium, and the actual sight of one of the enemy.

“I don’t think he will,” said Paul. “He’s just

scouting, I think. Probably he will ride back soon. And they can't be very near — the main body, that is. If they were we'd hear something of them."

Then before Arthur could answer, something happened. The air trembled, and a dull sound, echoing again and again, came to them. The two scouts stared at one another; then they turned, together, to look at the Uhlan, and saw that he had heard it, too, and was listening sharply. The light was full on his face, and they could see that it wore an awed expression. And well it might! They had heard the sound of the first heavy gun that was fired in anger in the war of the nations!

"That gun was some distance away. I should think it might have been fired at Fleron," said Paul. "The siege must have begun."

And now the air was full of sound. First from one side, then from the other, batteries and forts joined in the chorus. All around them, it seemed, the great voices of the guns were speaking. Soon individual explosions ceased to stand out; every-

thing was merged into a heavy, dull roar that beat against their ears and filled the air with a continuous tremor. Sometimes the roar rose in volume when a new battery came into action. For a few minutes Paul and Arthur were absorbed. They listened, spellbound, to the roar of the guns. There was something unreal about it. It did not seem possible that those guns were being fired to kill and destroy, for, as they looked out, everything was peaceful still. Save when their eyes fell upon the Uhlan, mounted on his horse. He sat in his saddle, stiff, erect, the very type of the vast army of which he was a tiny, undistinguishable part — as a rule. Now he was that army, for the two who watched him. Still they stared while the shadows advanced, eating into the light spaces that remained, until grey dusk settled over everything, and he seemed to slip into it, and become a part of the landscape. Then his horse moved; he turned, and cantered slowly out of sight.

His going somehow seemed to break a spell.

"Come! We must see what's going on back there," said Paul. "We can see the battery, you know, if those crosses really mean that a battery was to be located on the spot we had placed from the map."

They went to the other side of the little garage and looked out. And, to the east, on a piece of rising ground, that would have been hidden had the de Frenard house still stood, as it had stood before the fire, they saw something that looked like a picture of an inferno.

There was a great gash in the woods, where trees had been cut down ruthlessly. Against the background of the woods that had been spared, a lurid glare threw everything into relief. Great arc lights had been strung, so that a space of ground was as bright as day, and in the light hundreds of men were working. In one place a great furnace was blazing, and the ruddy glow from that cast a crimson light against the cold, white radiance of the electric lamps. Steam cranes were at work; huge cannon were being moved into place

on the pedestals that had been prepared for them in advance.

"We were right!" said Paul, exultingly. "That is to be a great battery. They must be very powerful guns, too, or else they would have been ready with the rest, and in action by this time. Ah! I'm glad I thought of the telephone!"

"How fast they are working!" said Arthur. That was what caught his eye in the strange, weird scene. There was no confusion, despite the extraordinary efforts that were obviously being made to hasten the work. Every man, as they could see, even at that distance, knew exactly what he was to do. It seemed that the whole operation must have been planned far in advance, even rehearsed. Such perfect team work could not be the result of chance, nor even of unusually good discipline. No, somewhere in Germany just such scenes must have been enacted in time of peace, that when the grim, harsh test of real war came there might be no delay, no lost motions, no trifling, unforeseen hitch to render useless all the

elaborate plan that had been made. This might be war, but it was a grim, cold business, too.

"It's like going to see the steel works at Seraing at night," said Paul. "Except that there's less glare from the blast furnaces, of course."

"A good many of those men aren't in uniform," said Arthur, his keen eyes taking in details as he grew more accustomed to the strange and awe inspiring grandeur of the scene as a whole.

"They're probably workmen from Essen," said Paul. He had a pair of binoculars out now, and was looking closely at every detail of the scene.

"But why should they be there? This is a time for soldiers."

"Not altogether, Arthur. I know — don't you remember what Uncle Henri told us?—that a lot of the workmen from Seraing would have to be along with some of the new field artillery pieces, because the secrets of some things are kept even from the soldiers. Those are probably some of the men from the Krupp works, brought here just to handle these big guns."

"Well, they take their chances, just like soldiers, if they do that, don't they?"

"Of course. They really are soldiers, just as much as the others, but they have special work to do, that they're trained for. That's the only difference."

"What are we going to do now?"

"We're going to try to spoil the little surprise these Germans are preparing for Boncelles and Embourg," said Paul, gritting his teeth. "You stay here by this window, Arthur. I'm going down to telephone to Boncelles. If anyone comes near, tell me at once. It's awfully important, you know, to keep them from finding out about our telephone wire just as long as we can. And listen, in case I call to you. I'll want a quick answer, if I do."

"All right, Paul."

Down Paul went, then, to the gasoline pit. Lying at full length, he drew the telephone instrument from the cunningly devised hiding place he and Arthur had arranged for it. He was fearful

for a moment; there was a chance, and more than a chance, that the German scouts might have found and cut the wire; they would certainly have tried to cut every telephone and telegraph wire in the neighborhood, as the first and most obvious precaution. But after a brief delay he was delighted to hear an answering voice.

Quickly he explained who he was, and found that his call had been expected. In a moment an artillery officer, who said he was Lieutenant Delaunay, was speaking.

“What information have you?” he asked, quickly. “I have your maps here before me.”

“Find the one that shows the Ourthe and the ground before Boncelles and Embourg,” said Paul.

“Right!”

“Mark the house of M. de Frenard, destroyed last night by fire.”

“I have it!”

“Good! To the east of the house the ground slopes upward. It is well sheltered from obser-

vation by the fort. Your searchlights would be blocked by the woods between the fort and the house. But there is a spot marked on the map by a group of crosses. Do you see it?"

"Right! We decided that would be a battery. The other forts report that they have been fired on from points marked on the maps that you supplied, and that by concentrating their fire on the points indicated on these maps they have silenced a number of field guns."

"I am glad," said Paul, quietly. "I was sure that the information would prove to be valuable. Well, then, this battery is not of field guns. That is why you have heard no firing from it as yet. They are working now, by electric light, and are placing heavy guns — not the very heaviest, I should say, but far heavier pieces than would usually be at the front so soon — probably seven inch mortars."

"Seven inch mortars! That sounds almost incredible!"

"None the less, it is true. You may open fire

at once on the spots marked on your map, and do great damage. We are in a position here to tell you whether your shells land properly or not—we can see the battery from here. Will you fire?"

"At once!" said Delaunay. "Go and watch for the shells—then report to us, if you can, whether they were properly aimed. You will be of the greatest service to us if you can do that. It is of the last importance that that battery should not come into action against us—these forts were not intended, when they were built, to withstand the battery of such heavy guns as that!"

Thrilled by the knowledge that the risks he and Arthur had run the previous night had not been in vain, Paul went upstairs and rejoined Arthur. To the east, where the frantic efforts of the Germans to get their heavy artillery into position for the opening attack were still continued, there was no apparent change in the situation.

"No one has come near," said Arthur. "Was the wire working? What did they say at Buncelles?"

Paul told him, and they settled down to wait. It was nervous work, tense and anxious. Two of the guns — they counted six of them, in all — were already in position, and finishing touches were being put to them.

“Oh, why don’t they hurry?” complained Arthur. “The Germans are not going to wait for them to be ready to fire.”

“Listen,” said Paul. “The fire is slackening a little, I think. You can see that what we did had some use — they have silenced a good many German guns already, through knowing just where to aim.”

“What’s that?” exclaimed Arthur, suddenly.

Overhead a strange noise filled the air; a shrieking, whining, whistling sound. It rose, as it came nearer, to a wild whistle, like the blast of a factory signal, releasing the workers at the end of the day’s work. The two scouts stared at one another; then, without knowing why, they turned to look at the busy scene to the east. Suddenly, before their eyes, there was a flash; a puff of white

smoke rising in the ghostly radiance of the arc lamps, and, after a distinct pause, a dull crash. Then, as the smoke cleared, and they still stood awe stricken, they saw that the bursting shell had torn a great hole in the ground. They saw men running; others were crawling, dragging themselves painfully along. And others still lay very quiet.

For just a moment there was a scene of wild confusion. But then order was restored, and a knot of men ran to the two guns that were uninjured and ready. Paul dived down at once. Quickly he told what had happened, then raced up again. Another whistling overhead, and then a terrific explosion. The two guns lay overturned, ruined.

CHAPTER X

PRISONERS OF WAR

For five minutes the two scouts, appalled, horrified, stood as if glued to the floor, staring at the scene of destruction. The guns in Fort Boncelles had the range now. Nothing more than Paul's hurried message, "Your shell landed beyond the guns," had been necessary. Now shell after shell was dropped in the midst of the battery that had been wiped out before it could fire even a single shot. There was a deadly, terrifying accuracy about the whole proceeding. Miles away the Belgian gunners, safe in their concrete and steel turrets, were producing this waste and destruction — not by fighting, it seemed to Paul and Arthur, but by a blackboard exercise. That was all it really was.

"You see, they know just where their gun is, and they can adjust it to fire a certain distance. They can take a map, and fire a shell at any given

spot, just by mathematics. They know the angle they must use, and they know just how far, and how fast that shell will go. It won't always go quite true, of course; that was why the first shell didn't strike just the right spot."

"But why is that, if everything is so exact? I shouldn't think they'd ever make a miss."

"Oh, there are lots of reasons. For one, after a gun has been fired a few times the inside is affected. The rifling is worn in places, and that gives a slightly different spin to the shell. It doesn't take much of a change in conditions to alter the course of a shell a good deal. And the weather counts, too. Sometimes there is more air resistance; on a day when it is damp and foggy, with low lying clouds, for instance. So, though they have the range exactly, they may have to alter what they call the formula a little."

"And they find out by shooting how nearly right they are?"

"Yes, that's just what they do. It's the only way they can do it, too. That's why it's so im-

portant, when guns are being fired at targets miles away, to have some one report the effect of the first shot or two. In a regular battle, in open country, both armies will probably use aeroplanes in this war. The man in the aeroplane can see just where the shells strike, and send back word."

"How?"

"In lots of ways. Some of the bigger ones have a small wireless equipment. Sometimes they drop bombs, that make a smoky patch in the air when they explode — they drop them right over the place the artillery wants to hit, and then the men with the guns get their instruments and figure out just what the range is."

"I don't think the Germans are so very brave, after all," said Arthur, in a moment. "They all ran as soon as the shells began to come."

"That doesn't show they're not brave — it only shows that their officers have some common sense. What good could they do if they stayed there to be killed? They couldn't save those guns, could they? I'm sorry they couldn't have been

warned, that's all. You see, they might have thought the first shell was just a chance, lucky shot and so they stayed after that, and tried to fire themselves. But when the second one came plumping into them they knew the truth — and the officers sent them to cover, just as any officers who knew their business would have done."

"I suppose it's war," said Arthur, a little gloomily. "But — "

"It's war right enough," said Paul, with a shudder. "It's not like the pictures we've seen of Waterloo, but it's war. But there'll be plenty of the other sort, too, before it's over, Arthur. You needn't worry about that. The Germans haven't had time to bring up very many men yet, but I expect they will, and they may try to rush the forts. Did you notice that they were stretching a lot of wire fencing near Fort Boncelles when we passed it last night?"

"Yes. What was that for?"

"To stop an infantry charge, or to help to stop it. You see, an attack by infantry is likely to be

made at night, when it's harder to see the men being massed. And the wire fence piles up a charge. Oh, I think there'll be some pretty bad fighting of the old-fashioned sort before they capture Liege!"'

"I don't see how they can capture Liege at all," said Arthur, stoutly. "The firing of the guns has almost stopped; it seems to me that they've been beaten back."

"It seems so, but I'm afraid it isn't really true," said Paul, with a smile. "The Germans haven't begun yet, Arthur. And there are millions of them. They can put thousands of men in the field to our hundreds — they will outnumber us ten to one, at least. Liege isn't supposed to hold out against them very long. No one expects it to. If it checks them, keeps them from spreading all over Belgium in their first rush, it will have done its part fully."

"I'd like to see them beaten here, just the same," said Arthur, stubbornly.

"I'm going down to report what happened," said Paul. "Keep watch, Arthur, but I don't

think we can do much more here. I believe that we won't have to stay here very much longer."

Boncelles had ceased firing by this time, and the close, immediate din was at an end for the time, at least. There was still heavy firing from the northwest, which Paul guessed was from the guns of Fort Pontisse, replying to an attack launched from Vise and Argenteau. Major du Chaillu had said that the Germans would almost certainly try to cross the Meuse at Vise, which was the best place they could choose to launch the cavalry raid he said would be likely to form a part of their strategy.

"We will have troops there," he said, "to try to hold them back, supported by Fort Pontisse. But if they come in great force they can probably break through there, for the place is not well suited to defence."

Everywhere else in the circle that was closing about Liege the firing seemed to have died away. And Paul was anxious to know how the opening skirmish — as he correctly judged it to have

been — had gone, as well as to make his report of what he and Arthur had seen. Delaunay was waiting at the Boncelles end of the wire.

“You are there at last!” he said, relief in his voice. “I was afraid you and your brave friend had been hurt.”

“No, we’re all right. It’s the Germans who were hurt! You smashed that battery to pieces, lieutenant! They never got a single gun ready to fire. Your second shell smashed the two that were in position, and the shells after that simply swept the location of the battery. I don’t think the guns can be of much use — not for a long time, and until they have been thoroughly repaired, at any rate. How has the fighting gone elsewhere?”

“We are holding them along the Meuse, north of Pontisse. They attacked with their infantry there, but we beat them back easily.”

“That is good news! We are holding them all along the line, then?”

“Yes, for the present. But they have not brought up large forces yet. When they do, it

will soon be over unless we receive heavy reinforcements. You two had better come in, if you can get away from your position without being detected. There is no more for you to do there. You have already accomplished far more than we hoped."

"We are to report to you at Fort Boncelles?"

"It makes no difference. No, I think you had better try to get into Liege itself and find Major du Chaillu. Good luck!"

"Thank you, lieutenant, and the same to Fort Boncelles! We will try to escape from here. I should think we ought to have no great trouble, for the Germans will be busy at their battery again, as soon as they find the shelling has ceased."

"Yes. We will give them another round or two at intervals during the night, just to let them know that we still think of them."

When he had finished talking to the fort, Paul proceeded to hide the telephone as well as he could. Sooner or later the Germans were certain

to come to the garage and it was desirable, for a good many reasons, that they should find no evidences of the use to which it had been put. For one thing, it was impossible to tell what was going to happen. It might well turn out that further use could be made of the telephone later. And when Paul had done, he felt that it was highly improbable that the Germans could discover the installation. And then, just as he finished, Arthur cried out in a voice sharp with alarm, and Paul rushed up to join him.

The ground about the garage seemed suddenly to have sprouted soldiers. There were men everywhere, hundreds of them, advancing in loose order. For a moment Paul hung to the window, fascinated by the sight. Then he caught himself.

“It’s an attack on Boncelles!” he said. “I’m going to warn them if I have time. I don’t care what happens. Arthur, get away from here! If they come in, pretend you can’t speak at all.”

And on the word he was off, rushing down again, tearing away the cover he had provided for

the telephone. He had to wait an agonizing two or three minutes before there was any answer, and once more he was sure that the wire must have been discovered and cut. But at last there was an answering voice in his ear, and he gave his news.

“Infantry?” asked Delaunay. “They must be mad!”

“They are planning a surprise attack, I suppose,” said Paul. “There are a great many of them — and I am almost sure I saw some machine guns.”

“If their battery hadn’t been put out, I could understand,” said Delaunay. “They might have attacked under the cover of a heavy fire from that. But to bring infantry against fortifications! It seems like suicide.”

“I must go now,” said Paul. “They are all around us. I don’t know how soon they may come in. You will be ready for them?”

“Don’t worry about that! We’ll give them a hotter reception than they expect!”

Paul smashed the telephone now. Perhaps the

Germans, if they found it, would think it had been useless from the beginning of the fighting. And, just as he went upstairs, there was a crash at the door, and half a dozen German soldiers, led by an officer, broke in. In a moment Paul was seized; in another two men had gone upstairs, and returned, each with a hand gripping one of Arthur's arms.

"What are you doing here?" asked the officer, in German. Paul understood him very well, but thought it better to pretend ignorance. He answered in French, saying he did not understand, and the German officer repeated his question in French.

"We — we lived in the house that was burned," said Paul, pretending to be greatly frightened. "We did not know where to go or what to do. So we stayed here."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since last night."

"You heard the explosions just now?"

"Yes. I did not know what they were."

"Take them back," said the lieutenant to a corporal. "You are in territory occupied by our forces where no civilians have any right to be," he added, speaking to Paul. "Unless you can prove that you are innocent, you will be tried and condemned as spies. Have you any arms here?"

"No, sir," said Paul.

A quick search confirmed his statement. But though that seemed to count in their favor, the order was not countermanded. In a few moments they were on their way through the German lines, and in half an hour they reached what was plainly the headquarters of a brigade at least, perhaps of a whole division. There they were thrust into a small hut that already contained three other prisoners, Belgian peasants. Outside the door there was a guard. They were prisoners of war and if the truth about their doings came out, they would almost certainly be shot, despite their youth.

CHAPTER XI

THE SPY

“What will they do to us, do you think?” asked Arthur. He was trembling, but with excitement, not from fear.

“Nothing, unless they can prove that we have actually been working against them,” answered Paul. “And I don’t see how they can.”

“If those two who chased us when we ran off with their motorcycle saw us, they’d be able to prove it,” said Arthur.

“Yes, I hadn’t thought of them. But they’re prisoners fortunately. I hope they’ll be well looked after, too. It would be mighty awkward if they turned up here suddenly. They know just how important were the plans we got and these others don’t know anything about that, at all. I believe that our people knowing just where the German guns were placed made a great deal of difference.”

The coming of a soldier interrupted them. He told them that they were to be examined at once.

"Then you will be shot," he said, showing his teeth. "As you deserve," he added, trying to look fierce.

But there was a twinkle in his eye that both Paul and Arthur saw. They had been treated very well so far. They had seen nothing, as a matter of fact, to make them think that the Germans were brutal. They made war, and that is brutal in itself. The gentlest men, when they are engaged in a campaign, must do things that they would never attempt of their own free will.

The soldiers now led the way to a house that both boys knew well, for it belonged to a friend of their uncle, whom they had often visited. It was being used as headquarters now by a part of the German staff, and was full of officers who looked at them curiously. They still wore their Boy Scout uniforms. There had been no opportunity, as a matter of fact, for them to change their clothes before the fire, and all the other clothes they possessed

had been destroyed, of course, at that time.

"You were caught by our troops in territory occupied by us — within our actual battle line, indeed," said a colonel who received them. "Did you not receive warning that all civilians were to leave the zone in which you were found?"

They could deny that truthfully, and did. Paul was rather glad, as the matter had turned out, that his plan of pretending to be dumb had not been tried. He knew that it would be very hard for Arthur to tell an untruth, even by suggestion, excellent as was the excuse for doing so. Arthur could understand, of course, that to deceive the enemy was permissible, and, more than that, praiseworthy. It was a question simply of whether he could hope to do so successfully.

"The thing to be done now is to get rid of you," said the colonel. He frowned severely, but, as with the soldier who had brought them for examination, there was a smile behind the frown. "I might have you shot, but we should save ammunition. And I might send you back to Germany, to

be confined in a fortress, but that would mean that we should have to feed you. If I let you go through the lines toward Huy, will you promise not to come back?"

"Yes, sir," said Paul, heartily. He was amazed by the prospect of release, but he realized, of course, that while he and Arthur knew what dangerous enemies they had already proved themselves, the colonel did not.

And so, to their surprise and Paul's relief, they were soon being escorted through the German lines, their direction being southwest, in the general direction of Huy, the Belgian city nearest to Liege of the border line of fortresses. Huy, though not as strong as either Liege or Namur, was a link in the chain, having been designed chiefly to supply a base for the centre of an army resisting the advance of an invader, with its wings resting on the more powerful fortifications of Liege and Namur.

Their escort was the same good-natured soldier who had taken them before Colonel Schmidt, and

he paid little attention to them. Perhaps he thought that there was no need to watch them closely; perhaps he was simply negligent. But, whatever the reason, Paul was able to discover the composition of the force upon which they had stumbled with a good deal of exactness. He learned to what regiment their escort belonged, and he also saw numbers on helmets and other identifying marks that supplied him with much other information. Neither he nor Arthur knew the real meaning of what they saw, but both boys knew that if they reached the Belgian lines they would find officers of the intelligence department to whom such facts would be valuable in the extreme. It was important, as both knew, for the Belgians and their allies to know something of the German plan.

Paul, indeed, had spoken of that very point to Arthur after their arrest.

“If we see what regiments are here, others can use what we tell them to determine what army corps are being used in this attack, and perhaps

what the general plan is," he had said. "Then the French will know where to mass their troops."

"Last stop!" said the soldier, finally. Some time before they had passed a sentry and for nearly a mile they had seen only outposts. "I must go back now. You are all right. We have passed the last of our posts. The next soldiers you see will be Belgians, unless we have cavalry in this direction. Perhaps this is a mistake. It might be better if I shot you myself, to make sure — eh?"

"You needn't trouble," said Arthur, and the soldier roared with laughter.

"All right, then, I won't!" he declared. "You are good boys. I am glad they let you go. But what will you do? You live in Liege, don't you? You can't get back there."

"We have friends in Brussels," said Paul. "I think we shall do very well now, thank you."

"Good! Then I will go back, and you will go forward — so! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" they echoed.

He drew himself up, stiffly, saluted, and then,

laughing, broke into the famous German goose step, used as a mark of respect to superior officers, for a few paces. In a few moments he was gone.

"I don't believe he wanted to come into Belgium and fight against us," said Arthur. "He was splendid to us, wasn't he? And the colonel was kind, too. It made me feel—oh, I don't know—"

"As if we were being sneaky? I know just what you mean. I felt like that, too. But I told myself that we couldn't think of whether we liked a few Germans who were good to us—that they weren't just people, they were part of the enemy."

"Yes. That's what I thought of, too. But it was hard just the same, Paul. I did feel like a sneak. But I suppose we are doing what is right."

"I wish there was some way of getting the news of what we've learned to-night into Liege," said Paul, frowning. "I don't see just what it all means, but I'm quite sure it's important. I tell you what—I believe they're sending even more

troops into Belgium than anyone thought they would. That soldier was from a regiment that is stationed with the army corps that has its headquarters in Koenigsburg, near the Russian border. It seems to me they are going to leave fewer troops there than anyone expected. Perhaps the staff knows that, but then perhaps it doesn't."

"If we get to Huy they can send word from there," said Arthur. "They must have wireless working, even if the Germans have cut all the wires."

"That's so! I hadn't thought. I don't know just where we are, though, do you?"

"Not exactly. They tried to keep us from finding out, I think. But I watched the stars whenever I could, and I think if we turn to the right here and keep on northeast, we'll come to the river road from Liege to Huy. Then we shouldn't have any trouble at all, so far as I can see."

Paul looked up at the stars himself, studied the lay of the land for a moment, and then nodded in agreement.

“Yes,” he said. “That’s what we’ll have to do. “Come on, then. We’ll cut across the fields. I’d rather do that than take chances on finding a path or a road. It can’t be so very far, do you think so?”

“No. Listen, Paul! What’s that?”

The exclamation was prompted by a sudden roar in the direction as nearly as they could guess of Fort Boncelles. At the same time the great searchlights that were steadily sweeping earth and air from the forts around Liege seemed to focus on one spot—the spot, they soon determined, from which the renewed sound of heavy firing came.

“That must be the attack on Fort Boncelles that we were afraid of,” said Paul.

“Well, they were ready for it, Paul. You don’t think it can succeed, do you?”

“I think we ought to know pretty soon. No, I don’t see how a fortified position can be carried by an infantry attack when its garrison is entirely prepared, unless the force is so overwhelming that

the attacking force can lose an awful lot of men — more men than the Germans have altogether, if we saw all, or even nearly all, of them."

They stayed where they were for a few minutes, listening to the firing. For the first time the note of real hand-to-hand fighting came into the battle din. They could hear the crashing volleys of rifle fire, and the explosive crackling of machine guns coming into play for the first time. That was confirmation enough of their guess that a regular assault on the line of forts was in progress.

"You see that just shows how important it is for them to capture Liege quickly, Arthur," said Paul. "They know perfectly well that when they bring up a few more army corps and their big guns they can batter the forts to pieces and just overwhelm our garrison."

"But they want to have the path clear for the extra army corps. That's what you mean, isn't it, Paul?"

"Exactly. They want the way through and around Liege clear, so that the great army, when

it's all ready, can sweep straight on and strike the French before they're ready for them. They don't want to bother with us at all. So they're willing to lose all those men just to save a few days."

"But why are a few days so tremendously important to them?"

"They've got to strike before France is ready, because they can't use their whole army against France. They must keep a great many corps to use against Russia, or else Russian soldiers will get to Berlin before the Germans get to Paris. And their chance is to do it in the first few days of the war. France takes nearly a week longer than Germany to mobilize, and Russia almost a month longer than either France or Germany. You see what we will do at Liege and Namur is to hold up the Germans long enough to make up for their being able to mobilize more quickly."

The firing was dying away now; the heavy guns resumed their work, and the lighter machine guns were silent.

"I think they've repulsed the attack all right,"

said Paul. "That's why the fire has slackened. Come on! We really haven't so much time to lose."

So they struck off from the road, crossing into a field full of grain.

"It seems a shame to trample down this grain, but it's got mighty little chance of being harvested this season anyhow," said Arthur.

"Yes. The German army will advance this way probably, and, even if it didn't, I don't believe there would be men enough to garner the crop."

Suddenly Arthur stumbled. He had walked against a man who was lying amid the grain. Now the man started up with a cry. And they both recognized Ridder—the man who had dropped the all-important plans!

CHAPTER XII

A CLOSE SHAVE

Blind instinct sent them both running, though a moment of reflection would have told them that to run was the worst thing they could have done. Ridder had been asleep and he did not arouse himself fully at first. And perhaps that saved them. He did fire after them once but his aim was bad, and before he could fire again they had leaped a hedge and dropped out of his sight into a sunken road that crossed the fields parallel to the course they were taking toward the river road to Huy. They had a good start and Ridder was fifty yards behind them when they reached the shelter of the road. Here Paul pulled himself together.

“Stop!” he said to Arthur, seizing his chum by the arm. “Here, get right into the shadow of the hedge here, at the side of the road — there’s almost a ditch, too. If he follows us, he may go straight on, and he won’t know which direction

we took. It's the best chance we have to escape."

"Do you think he recognized us?" asked Arthur.

"I don't know. But our running away like that made him suspicious — we can be sure of that much, anyhow. Look out! I hear him coming!"

Down they crouched, just in time. Ridder came tumbling through the hedge, growling fiercely.

"If I were sure!" he said fiercely and under his breath, so that they could scarcely hear him. "Those verflutchen boys! If I knew that they were the ones who stole my papers!"

In the middle of the road he paused and rubbed his eyes. He reeled a little as he stood; it was plain that the man was in the last stages of exhaustion. The two scouts, even without knowing in detail what the duties of a spy in wartime might be, could understand Ridder's exhaustion. They could guess how much he must have done since they had last seen him.

As they crouched, watching him, he dropped his head, like a dog looking for a scent suddenly

vanished, and seemed to hesitate, wondering which way to go. He circled around, apparently looking for something to guide him. The road was hard, and baked dry. There had been no rain for a good many days, and so their footprints did not show. Ridder tossed his head at last in decision. The two scouts began to breathe again in a more normal fashion when he turned down the road and went along, still muttering. He swayed from side to side as he walked.

“Poor chap!” said Paul, finally. “I feel sorry for him! And I’m certainly glad he was so tired! I wouldn’t give much for our chances if he had caught us. He knows by this time, you can be sure, what we did with those plans.”

“I don’t feel sorry for him — he’s a spy!” said Arthur.

“We’re spies, too,” said Paul, soberly. “And a good many Belgians will be spies, and Frenchmen, too, before this war has been going on very long. It’s not nice work. There isn’t the glory and the excitement about it that there is for the

soldiers who are doing the fighting. But a spy does more for his country, if he succeeds in getting some really important information, than a whole regiment of men who do nothing but fight."

"I suppose so," admitted Arthur, grudgingly.
"It's safe to go on now, isn't it?"

"Yes. I don't think we'll find our friend Ridder in the next field! And I hope we won't run into any more Germans of any sort."

As they walked along, the searchlights still flashed to their right and at intervals sounds of heavy firing came to them from the same direction. But the steady, ceaseless cannonading was over, and there had been no renewal of the sounds that indicated fighting at close quarters. Liege, it was easy to understand, was holding out.

Their course across the fields finally brought them to the river road, where they felt themselves at home. This road they knew thoroughly, having traversed it many and many a time. Now they were well on their way to Huy and felt that there was no reason now why they should not ar-

rive safely. But suddenly Paul stopped.

“There’s no use in our getting to Huy before morning, before it’s light, anyway,” he said. “The sentries wouldn’t let us by. You know this is wartime. We’re not used to that yet. Everything is changed. I’m tired, and I know you are, too. I think the best thing we can do is to get some sleep. We can’t tell what we may not have to do after we get to Huy, and we’d better be fresh and ready for whatever turns up.”

“I am tired,” admitted Arthur. “I think you’re right. Where shall we sleep?”

“We’ll find a place before long,” said Paul. “How peaceful it is here! If we couldn’t see the searchlights and hear the guns now and then there’d be nothing to make it seem as if there was real fighting going on within a few miles.”

Houses were fairly frequent as they went along, but all were dark. Their occupants, if they had not fled from the nearness of war, were all asleep. They were farm houses in the main; here, as everywhere in Belgium, the land was cut up into innu-

merable tiny patches, even smaller than the peasant farms of France. In the fields were endless rows of vegetables — beans, turnips, cabbages, and garden truck of all sorts. This was the sort of country that had made Belgium known for years as the vegetable garden of Europe. Finally they stopped near a dark house, and made themselves comfortable in the lee of a haystack. And there they slept until the light of the sun came to rouse them. They awoke to see a peasant boy staring stupidly at them.

“Good-morning!” said Paul, rousing himself. “Can we get breakfast in your house if we pay for it?”

“I suppose so,” said the peasant. “My mother may have some for you. My father has gone to fight.”

They followed him to the little cottage, and there they got what the woman could give them for breakfast — eggs and milk, as it turned out. In a few days, though she did not realize this, neither would be obtainable thereabout at any

price; the German host would have spread over the countryside like a swarm of locusts. Perhaps it would pay for what it ate, but it would eat at all events, regardless of that, and the money it might leave in the place of the food it took would be valueless, since money can buy nothing when there is nothing to be sold.

But these were things of which neither the peasant woman nor the two scouts thought. They ate their breakfast with relish, not having realized until they saw the food how hungry they really were, and then, refreshed in mind and body, they began the last stage of their journey to Huy. They had not so very far to go and they entered the Belgian city to the tune of the distant cannon at Liege.

In Huy there was little to make one think of war. People were grouped in the streets, waiting eagerly for the news of what was going on at Liege, for all sorts of rumors were spreading about. On one side it was said that England had already declared war and had destroyed the Ger-

man fleet; on the other that England had refused to fight at all. But most of the people of the town went about their business in the most unconcerned way, as if the invasion of the country could not possibly affect them, and their own affairs were still the most important things in the world for them.

There was only a small force of Belgian troops in Huy, as Paul and Arthur soon learned. And, to their dismay, they found that the officer in charge refused absolutely to listen to them! He was a pompous, greatly excited little man, most of whose service had been in the Congo, and he laughed at the suggestion that they could have information of value.

“But if you will send a wireless message to Liege Major du Chaillu will tell you that our information is correct,” pleaded Paul. “At least he will tell you that we gave valuable news before, and that we can be trusted.”

“There are other things for the wireless to do in times like these,” said the officer pompously.

“Be off with you, now. I have no time to waste on boys!”

“No wonder the Germans can win!” said Paul, bitterly. “What chance has an army with an officer so stupid as that?”

He had given up the attempt to convince the commandant, for it was obvious that they would only waste time and breath if they persisted.

“But what are we to do?” asked Arthur. “We must let them know in some way.”

“We must go to Brussels,” said Paul. “There are those there who will know that we can be trusted, and we may find a way of getting a wireless message through to Major du Chaillu.”

But, as they soon found, it was one thing to decide to go to the capital, and quite another to accomplish their desire. The railway was choked by military movements. Troops and supplies of all sorts had usurped every means of travel, except by walking. Though Huy itself might appear to be normal, no other part of the country was, as it was easy to discover when an attempt

was made to do even the most ordinary things.

“Well, if we can’t ride, we can start walking,” said Paul. “If we wait here we’ll never get anywhere, that’s sure. There’s more confusion here than there was at Liege, and a lot less reason. The thing to do is to get away before they close the town up absolutely, so that we can’t even do that.”

But even that resolution could not be carried out without difficulties. For some reason — they learned later that it was because new troops were advancing from that direction — they were not allowed to pass along the road leading to Namur, which was the logical one for them to take in an effort to reach Brussels. Their plan had been to pass through Gembloux and Wavre, after turning around Namur. They were obliged, instead, to start back toward Liege, turning north after a few miles and heading for the railroad at Saint Trond.

“If we get that far I think we’ll have a chance to get on a train,” said Paul. “From all I hear, there will be troops there, covering Brussels.”

“Covering Brussels? But it’s nowhere near the

city!" exclaimed Arthur in great amazement.

"That doesn't matter, Arthur. Brussels will be defended at long range or not at all. If the Germans get past Tirlemont and Haelen they will get to Brussels, I think, without any more opposition."

"But why? There are no fortifications there."

"I believe there are — by this time," said Paul. "Earthworks, at least. You see, it would simply mean terrible destruction and suffering if a city like Brussels were defended. It has no forts, and it would be a simple matter for the Germans to stand off and bombard it. It is like that with Louvain. It would be better to let the Germans capture that town without resistance than to force them to bombard it and destroy the famous old buildings there. If a great city cannot be defended by an army fifty miles away, it is better not to defend it at all."

The idea of such a tame yielding of Brussels, where he had been born and had lived most of his life, seemed to depress Arthur greatly. For a long

time they went along in silence. Then a peasant came along with a cart and offered them a ride. This man seemed to know little or nothing of the war, although, like them, he must have been able to hear the sullen growling of the cannon from Liege, that showed the fortress was still holding out. They rode for several miles with this man, until he had to turn off. Then they began walking again. And now, before them, directly in their path but still some considerable distance away, they saw smoke rising on the horizon, a pall of heavy, brownish smoke with patches of black. It was not at all like the faint haze that hung over Liege, the result of smokeless powder.

“There must be a fire,” said Arthur.

“I should think so,” said Paul, grimly. “The Uhlans are ahead of us, Arthur.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE CIVIC GUARDS

That this was no mistaken guess they soon learned. Half a mile of fast walking brought them to a small village, and there they met a stream of panic-stricken refugees, fleeing from their own burning homes a little further on. The people of the village swarmed about the newcomers, exclaiming in horror and anger at their stories. Paul and Arthur listened.

German cavalry, it seemed, had ridden in early that morning, and posted notices, in German, French and the Walloon dialect that many of the peasantry still used. These notices warned all the people that the German army had occupied the town or village, and that no act of violence against the invaders must be committed. All arms, it read, were to be surrendered, and certain rules about keeping lights in every window and leaving all doors unlocked must be strictly obeyed.

If obedience were given, said the Germans, no harm would be done to the occupied places or to any of their citizens.

“Then they rode away,” a woman was saying. “And presently foot soldiers came in their places. And — a shot was fired. It struck an officer. Then they went into the house where the man who fired the shot had been, and they brought out every man they found in it, and killed them right before all of us, before they set the house on fire. And they set other houses on fire, too, where they said they found guns and pistols! They said we were murderers! Is it murder to defend oneself in time of war? My man is with the army! Is he a murderer?”

Arthur was panting with anger as he listened. Paul, seeing this, drew him aside.

“I suppose you think she’s right, don’t you, Arthur?” he asked, quietly.

“Of course! If you were in your home and you saw German soldiers coming, wouldn’t you shoot as many as you could?”

“Perhaps. But I’d expect them to take me out and shoot me, when they caught me, and burn my house. I wouldn’t call them brutes and barbarians for doing it.”

“But why? Isn’t it war to attack the enemy?”

“Yes, if soldiers do it. Soldiers ought to fight soldiers. If women and men who aren’t in uniform fight, they must expect to be attacked themselves. Listen, Arthur! If our soldiers were in Germany they’d have to do just what the Germans are doing here, to protect themselves. They’d have to frighten the people into playing fair, if it couldn’t be done any other way. It isn’t fair to hide and shoot a man who isn’t expecting it, is it? At any rate, those are the laws of war. France and Belgium have agreed to them, and bound themselves by them, just as the Germans have done. So we can’t complain if the Germans stick to the rules. Don’t do anything foolish now. The Germans may be here any minute, if they’re as close to us as these people say.”

“I’ll do whatever you say, Paul,” Arthur

agreed, finally. "But it doesn't seem sensible to me."

"It is sensible and right, believe me," said Paul, earnestly. "And I think we'll stay here, Arthur, for a little while, anyway. I believe there'll be a chance for us to do some good work here. If we can keep these poor people from acting so that the Germans will destroy their village it will be a good thing, won't it?"

"Ye—es, I suppose so. Yes, I can see that, Paul. Even if I think it's all wrong, I can see that the Germans are too strong. They can do whatever they like, whether it's right or not."

"That's one way to look at it," said Paul. "That's one of the things I hope to try to make them understand — that they'd better submit to injustice than lose their homes. Might makes right, though the Germans have a good excuse for acting in the way they do."

"Still I don't see what good we can expect to do, Paul. These people here don't know us, and I don't believe they'll pay any attention to any-

thing we say," deep doubt written on his face.

"I think perhaps they will, Arthur. You see, we're in uniform and I'm hoping that they don't know anything about the Boy Scouts here. They may think our uniform means that we're connected with the army in some fashion, and respect it."

"I didn't think of that! I say, that would be rather good fun, wouldn't it?"

"Look!" said Paul, suddenly. "That's just what I was afraid of!"

A dozen men, in ill assorted and badly fitting uniforms, were coming from the inn that was the dominating feature, aside from the inevitable parish church, of the village.

"They belong to the civic guard," said Paul. "I'm afraid they are going to try to resist the Germans. Look at those guns!"

"They're the old-fashioned ones they used in the army years ago, aren't they, Paul?"

"Yes, and they'd be about as much good against the new German rifles as so many pea-shooters!"

The sight of the patchwork uniforms, worn by armed men, seemed to be a magnet for the panic-stricken inhabitants of the village. So far the people had been far too busy with their fears and their eagerness to save themselves to pay any attention to the two scouts, and so Paul and Arthur were able to attach themselves to the crowd and follow the civic guardsmen without exciting too much attention. There were curious glances at their uniforms, but Paul was well pleased by this. He wanted the people to notice their khaki suits, and he was glad that they seemed to be rather mystified.

The leader of the guardsmen was a big, burly man, by trade a butcher. Under his direction his men and a host of volunteer helpers proceeded to erect a barricade across the road by which, it seemed, the Germans must enter the village if they came. Old furniture, broken down wagons, mattresses — anything that came to hand was used in building the barricade. Then it was covered in front with branches of trees and bushes.

“There!” said the big butcher, when it was done to his satisfaction. “Now we can take up our place behind that — and God help the German pigs! Jean, do you and Marcel go up in the windows of Boerman’s house, there, and make holes in the shutters to shoot through. If they drive us from this barricade we will take to the houses and the roofs, and do what we can from there.”

A cheer greeted his speech.

“Now we shall be safe!” said one woman. “Ah, if they had had one like Raymond the butcher to show them how to fight, those poor people would not have been driven from their homes! He is a man!”

“I think so, too, Paul!” whispered Arthur. “It’s something to make a fight like this, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is something,” said Paul. “It’s suicide, that’s what it is! How long can they stand against the Germans? They will throw their own lives away and they won’t save the village. Instead, they will simply make it certain that it will be destroyed. The Germans won’t fight them on

even terms. If they find that the place is to be defended they'll bring a couple of guns into action and shell the place. In five minutes every house will be on fire, and they will shoot down the men as they try to run from the flames. Wait! I'm going to see what I can do!"

Arthur did not seem to be convinced. But when Paul ran forward and stood before the crowd by the barricade, Arthur was by his side. He was like a good soldier, obeying his superior officer, as he felt Paul was, even though he neither understood nor approved the orders he received.

Now, indeed, the khaki uniforms of the scouts attracted their share of attention. There was a murmur of surprise; one or two lads laughed aloud. But the chief emotion of the crowd was one of curiosity. As Paul walked up to the big, self-satisfied butcher, the noise behind the barricade died away.

"Are you the leader here?" asked Paul.

"Yes — chosen by the Garde Civique of the village of Hannay, in this time of danger!" an-

nounced the butcher, swelling up with pride.

"Then it is your duty to save the people entrusted to your care by ordering them to go to their homes and to stay there quietly if the Germans come," said Paul. "Also to call upon your guards and all others in the village to give up their arms and on no account to fire a shot against the Germans if they come."

"Eh?" said the astonished Raymond. "Is that the way to save the village from the Germans?"

"Is it not better to give in to them and know that no one will be hurt than to make it necessary for them to fire with their cannon? As for your men, they can do nothing here. If they want to serve their village and their country, let them enlist in the army."

"Eh?" said Raymond again. He was half angry and wholly puzzled. Paul did not defer to him at all; he spoke aggressively, and as if he were entirely sure of himself and of what he was saying. "Who are you, that you come here giving orders?"

"I'm giving no orders," said Paul. "I am only telling you what the government wishes. The Germans do not recognize the Garde Civique as soldiers at all. They are treated as spies, or as outlaws. Any man who bears arms against the Germans, or shoots at any German, will be shot as soon as he is caught."

Paul spoke purposely in a loud tone. He saw that his words were making an impression, not so much on Raymond as on some of the others.

"They won't make prisoners of war of you, you see," he said. "Those who aren't killed by the shells will be caught, and then they will be shot or hung. They won't be sent back to Germany, to be safe and sound, with plenty of food and a good place to sleep. They will be treated just like men who kill other men in time of peace, except that they won't have a trial."

"What of it?" asked Raymond, who was beginning to realize that this sort of talk was bad for his authority. "We can only die once for the Fatherland! Isn't that so?"

“Then die so that it will be of service for you to die!” said Paul. “Tear down your barricade. Give up your arms. And then let those of you who want to fight go to Huy and enlist. There will be plenty of fighting for you then, and if you are captured you will be treated like soldiers, and not like murderers and robbers. If you were not patriots you would not be willing to do this. Then why not do what will be useful?”

For a moment there was silence. Raymond stood still, his mouth open, staring at the two scouts. And then there came sudden aid for Paul. From behind the barricade a small, determined looking woman appeared. She marched straight up to Raymond.

“Give me that gun!” she said.

There was a titter and in a moment it had spread until it became a roar of laughter. Raymond the blusterer, wholly unnerved by the sudden appearance of his small wife, surrendered at once, and without conditions.

“Be off, the rest of you!” she said. “I daresay

the young gentleman is quite right! As if you could fight against the Germans here!"

Raymond's wife had given the rest a cue. In a few moments the barricade was being dismantled. In five minutes peace reigned. And Raymond, entirely subdued now, came to Paul.

"Need we give up our arms?" he asked.

"You know what the Germans order," said Paul. "Perhaps they have no right to do so, but they have the strength to enforce their orders, and that is what counts, after all. Believe me, I would like to fight. But when there is no chance of winning, the wise soldier saves himself for a day when things will be more even. Look, there are the Germans coming now!"

CHAPTER XIV

SUBMISSION

It was true. A dozen Uhlans rode into the village, trotting along on their big, rawboned horses, as coolly as if they had been on parade in Berlin. Only these men did not look like parade soldiers. Their uniforms were of the neutral gray that faded into the background at short distances, and they were dirty and travel worn, besides. Their horses, however, were still in fine condition, for it was a part of their training to see to it, wherever they were, that their mounts were properly cared for.

The soldiers ignored entirely the few people who still remained outside their houses. Most of the villagers, impressed by what Paul had said, or, like Raymond, the blustering butcher, more afraid of their wives than of the foreign enemy, had gone within, and the place was very quiet. But those who had not gone in greeted the Germans with

sullen looks, which did not provoke so much as a smile.

One of the Uhlans, evidently detailed in advance for the duty, produced proclamations and orders, like the ones the refugees had described. These he affixed to posts and buildings in conspicuous places. Then he joined his fellows, and the little troop rode on, with a clattering of hoofs to the mairie, the official centre of Hannay. There stood the maire, a small, spectacled, frightened man, with the parish priest to support him, waiting for them. Paul and Arthur drew near to listen.

“Which is the burgomeister?” asked a young lieutenant with closely cropped head and a tiny blonde moustache, which he had tried in vain to cultivate so that it would resemble the moustache that the German Kaiser’s pictures have made famous. Paul noticed that this young officer spoke excellent French, with hardly a trace of an accent. It impressed him as showing how well the Germans had prepared for this war that apparently only they had known was bound to come.

"It is I," said the little man very promptly.

"Say 'Sir!' when you speak to a German officer!" thundered the lieutenant. "And salute! Tell all your people to do so, also."

"Yes, sir," said the maire. "But how are we to know it is an officer we see? We poor people do not understand all about your uniforms."

"If you are in doubt, salute every German soldier," said the officer contemptuously. "They are worthy of your salutes in any case, and it will be better for your people to salute a thousand soldiers without the necessity of doing so than to fail to salute one officer who is entitled to the honor."

"Yes, sir," said the maire, meekly.

"Hannay is occupied by the German army," said the lieutenant, then, smiling a little at the maire's timidity. Was he wondering if a German burgomeister would submit as tamely were it a German village that had witnessed the arrival of invading troops? Probably not! Few German officers in those days thought it possible that an enemy's foot would ever tread the soil of the fath-

erland. No such fear had yet assailed them.

“You and your people,” the lieutenant went on, “must observe exactly the rules that are posted in the proclamations, especially with regard to arms. We shall not remain here, but other troops will arrive before nightfall. When they come all arms must be piled here, waiting for them. Five hundred loaves of bread, a hundred hams, twenty-five barrels of flour, five steers and ten barrels of wine are requisitioned, and must be turned over to the commissary department upon its order.”

The maire threw up his hands in horror.

“But, sir, we are poor people!” he cried. “We shall starve if all those things are required of us! We shall not have enough for our own needs.”

“That is your concern,” said the German officer indifferently. “The German army must be supplied; it is delayed in Belgium because of the unwarranted resistance of the Belgian government to its peaceable passage.”

“But—”

“Silence! No argument! You will provide the

supplies that are required. In addition all gasoline in the place is to be collected and turned over to the proper authorities. Payment will be made for all private property that may be taken."

He barked out a sharp order then, and the Uhlans rode on. Paul turned to Arthur, whose eyes were blazing.

"Did you hear that?" he cried. "He talks as if we were to be blamed for defending ourselves! Is that the way the Germans mean to talk?"

"I suppose so," said Paul. "I have heard before that they would do that. They say, you see, that all they wanted was permission to send their troops across Belgium to reach France. Perhaps they really believed that we should not resist. If we had not, they would not have damaged the country, and perhaps if they had won in the war, they would have paid for whatever injury was done. But how absurd! If we had allowed that, without making any further attempt to stop them, we should really have been just as badly off."

"I don't understand that, Paul. I would rather

see the whole country ruined than have it act so, but if we had made no resistance they could not have done things like this, could they?"

"No, perhaps not. But think a minute, Arthur. The French, then, would have come over the border on their side. The French and German armies would have met in Belgium, and neither would have considered our poor country. They would have fought in our fields, and seized our forts. Each would have bombarded our cities, and neither would have been our friend. Now, as it is, we are suffering for France, and France and her ally, England, must take our part. Perhaps they will not be strong enough to save us at once, but they will be obliged to stand by us, for the sake of their own honor."

"Yes, that is true. We shall have friends, at least. Oh, Paul, I suppose it was right not to attack those Germans, but when that officer spoke so, I could have tried to kill him with my bare hands!"

"He is a bully, Arthur. I suppose there are

officers like that in every army. But all the Germans are not like him. You must remember that there are some, at least, like Colonel Schmidt who gave us our freedom after we had been caught. He was kind to us, and he would have been courteous here, had he been in the place of this lieutenant."

Now, when the Uhlans had gone, the people began to come out of their houses again. News of the demand that had been made upon Hannay spread rapidly, and after a little while there was a great deal of bustle and confusion as efforts were made to obtain what was required. The maire came to Paul and asked him what the Germans would do if the things were not provided.

"I don't know," said Paul. "And I think it would be better not to find out, if you can possibly get them. Have them ready, and then when the new force comes, see if the commander is not more reasonable than the officer who was here. But it is better to take no chances. And he said that they would pay."

"Yes, that is so," said the distracted little man. "Eh? Well, I suppose we had better do as you say. Our lives and our homes are worth more than the food to us."

But there were sullen, angry looks among the villagers as they went about their preparations. There seemed to be a revulsion of feeling in favor of the plan of resistance of Raymond, the butcher, and there were scowls for Paul, who had spoiled that plan.

"I think there is nothing more that we can do here," said Paul to Arthur. "Let's go on. It's just as important as ever for us to get somewhere where the information we have can be of use. Everything I see makes me more and more certain that the principal German attack will be delivered in this direction. And I am not sure that that is generally known yet. I heard officers in Liege, when we were waiting to see General Leman, say that the French were planning a great movement from Belfort, that they thought the Germans were likely to make a powerful attack from Alsace and

Lorraine. If so, their information is wrong."

"But they must know by this time that the Germans are coming through Belgium instead, in great force, I should think."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. They may think it is a feint. It might be, too. You see, they are throwing out their cavalry. We saw a dozen Uhlans, but there must be two or three thousand dozen of them. They are like a great human screen, thrown in front of the army. A screen with eyes. They hide what is going on behind them from the enemy, but they themselves can see plainly."

"But even if it is true, I should think it might work both ways, Paul. If the French advance from Belfort, and the main body of the Germans is in this quarter, won't the French in Alsace win very easily?"

"Perhaps, just at the beginning. But this is the great danger. If the Germans could advance on this line without meeting any great resistance, they would be able to swing around and get in the rear of a French army that had crossed the border

into Alsace, but the French army could not come into a position to threaten the rear or the communications of the Germans. There might be a great disaster. And just because it was believed that Germany would find the road through Belgium the quickest and the easiest for an invasion of France, some French and Belgian officers believed that if war came, Germany would only make a threat through Belgium, and would start her real attack on some other line."

"Well, we ought to give the information, whether it will be of any great use or not. It isn't for us to think about that."

"You're right there, Arthur! Let's slip away quietly. We have done these people here a great service, but they don't quite understand, and I think that instead of being grateful they're almost ready to be suspicious. Perhaps they think we were really trying to help the Germans."

So they slipped out of the village. If any of the villagers of Hannay noticed, they said nothing. They had enough to keep them busy and to occupy

their minds, as well. They were learning that this war, of which they knew so little, was affecting them almost as much as if they were actually fighting.

Outside of Hannay, as they moved along toward the north the ground rose gradually, and the road brought them, in less than a mile, to the top of a hill that gave them an excellent view of the surrounding countryside. From Liege there still came the thunder of the big guns, but from other directions they gathered evidence that the fortress was no longer guarding the country. It was still holding out, and was undoubtedly keeping a great many Germans busy. But more Germans had swept around it, and the evidences of their activities were plain.

On all sides smoke was rising, marking burned farmhouses, even whole villages that for one reason or another had been given to the flames. They could see now the smoking ruins of the village whence the refugees who had really caused them to stop in Hannay had come, a scene of desolation

that looked all the worse for the bright sunlight in which it was bathed. That same sunlight, too, was reflected ever and again on tiny points of steel.

“Uhlans — the sun shines on their lance heads,” explained Paul. He looked gloomily at the scene. “Ah, they will have to pay! Perhaps an enemy will cross the Rhine and carry fire and sword into their lands, too. I hope so — for the sake of the poor, homeless ones.”

“But you said it was wrong for them to defend themselves — that the Germans had the right to do like that!” said Arthur, wonderingly.

“I said it was wrong for them to give the Germans an excuse to destroy their homes and kill their men,” said Paul. “Wrong only because it is useless.”

The descending road turned just below the crest of the hill on which they stood. And suddenly a bugle sounded, startlingly near. The two scouts had been so occupied in watching the country for miles about that they had given no heed to what might be going on close by. And so now while

they stood in amazement and dismay, German soldiers began to appear over the hilltop, and in a moment they were surrounded by hundreds of the men whose uniforms were so familiar. It was a battalion of German infantry, and in a minute more they had been seized, and were being escorted to the rear, where in a few moments a burly major, plainly a soldier of the old school, and the commander of the battalion, questioned them.

They told their story plainly and truthfully, though they omitted, of course, all the incidents of the adventurous period between their discovery of the spy Ridder and their first capture.

“We are only doing what Colonel Schmidt told us to do, sir,” said Paul. “We explained to him that we would try to reach Brussels, and after we got to Huy, we were compelled to come this way.”

The major nodded.

“Pfadfinder, hein?” he said. This, as both Paul and Arthur knew, was what the Boy Scouts were called in Germany, just as in France and Belgium they were called Eclaireurs Francais or Eclaireurs

Belges, as the case might be. "You can go no further this way. We shall take you to Hannay, and there you will have to stay for a time. No civilians are allowed at this time to leave their own villages. The whole country beyond here is a battleground, for we shall soon be in touch with the enemy on the way to Brussels. Still, you shall be safe enough. I have a boy of my own, who is a Pfad-finder with a troop in Eisenach."

CHAPTER XV

THE BUTCHER'S WIFE

Major Kellner was walking.

"I am saddle weary," he explained. "So I am walking for a time for a rest and a change, while they lead my horse. Walk with me, you young ones."

They found that Major Kellner, gruff as he was, was really an officer of the same kindly type as Colonel Schmidt, whom it seemed he knew very well.

"If Colonel Schmidt was satisfied to let you go, it is well," he said. "Now tell me what you have seen."

There was not much, of course, that they could tell him. He was not trying, it seemed, to extract military information from them, but wanted to know how the Belgian people felt about the war.

"We have nothing against your people," he said. "It is the stupid government that has

caused all this trouble. Had King Albert submitted to the inevitable, his country would not have suffered. We do not wish to be harsh with the people."

"Then why are you burning their farmhouses and their villages everywhere?" asked Arthur, boldly. "Standing on the hilltop, we could see the smoke on all sides."

Major Kellner laughed.

"It is kind sometimes to be cruel," he said. "We have a great work to do, and whoever stands in our way must suffer. We want the Belgians to understand that if they do not oppose us, except with their armies, they will be spared. But we must make an example of those who fire at us treacherously, or who keep guns and other weapons after we have ordered them to be given up. If we are severe with those who have refused to heed the warning that we have given, it is so that the others will pay more attention. It is better to burn a few villages than to destroy your beautiful city of Brussels, is it not?"

“But why do either?” parried Arthur then. “Because the lives of our soldiers must be guarded against the skulking murderers who hide behind a window and shoot when there is no chance for our men to reply. Our men take their lives in their hands when they go to war, and if they die on the field of battle, they die willingly because they know that it is for the Fatherland. So we must preserve them for that glorious death.”

Arthur was silent. He was not convinced, but he felt that it would do no good to argue, and Paul, moreover, had managed to look at him, so that he understood that his chum and leader wanted him to be quiet.

When they came near to Hannay Major Kellner mounted his horse again, since he had to maintain his dignity when he was entering a captured place, however small it might be. He spurred his horse on and took his place at the head of the battalion.

“Now we’re in a nice fix, aren’t we?” said Arthur, disgustedly. “We’re further from our

own army than ever! Likely to stay, too!"

"I hope that we shall be able to get away from here soon, Arthur. I don't believe they'll hold us very long. And we're really in luck, I suppose. If there are German troops all around, others would have held us up, if we hadn't come on this detachment, and we've had proof for ourselves that all the officers wouldn't treat us as well as Major Kellner. Suppose it was that young lieutenant of Uhlans who had caught us?"

Arthur made a grimace.

"Ugh!" he said. "Yes, that's true! Or a detachment that had that man Ridder along! You're right, Paul. We might be a great deal worse off than we are! But I'll tell you one thing. When we come back into Hannay with the Germans, there will be a lot of people there who are sure that we have been in league with them from the beginning."

"I hope not," said Paul, looking troubled. "But I'm afraid you're right. They can't understand, of course. I don't blame them for feeling as they

do. But it's rather hard, when I was only trying to do what would be best for them. And I believe we did save them from having a very bad time there. You see, these people have a couple of guns along. They're not very big, and they wouldn't make very much impression on a fortified place, but if they were turned on a defenseless village like Hannay, they would destroy it in a very few minutes."

In Hannay, as the battalion marched in, past the remains of the barricade, at which most of the men looked with a tolerant smile, the street was again deserted. Major Kellner rode straight up to the mairie, and Paul and Arthur could see that he was holding a conference with the maire. The battalion was halted and during this conference stood at ease. Then quick orders came back; never from the officers, but always, Paul noticed, from the non-commissioned officers, to whom the captains and lieutenants gave the commands.

Then the battalion split up. One company broke ranks and immediately swarmed through the vil-

lage, looking curiously at everything, while the other marched on, passing out of sight before long in a cloud of dust. Major Kellner remained with the company that stayed behind, and Paul and Arthur, who were at liberty, seemingly, to wander about the village as they pleased, saw him looking for quarters in disgust. After a time he settled upon the house of the local doctor, and there he and the officers were soon at home. Meanwhile the men scattered themselves in the different houses of the place, two to each house, as a rule, though sometimes there were more.

“Why are they staying here, I wonder?” said Arthur.

“I don’t know,” said Paul, with a shrug of his shoulders. “But I suppose there will be fighting all along here if the Germans advance on Brussels. It’s all done on orders from the staff headquarters, you see. If I knew what sort of a force was operating here, perhaps I could tell you. I think Liege is being attacked by one army corps — that’s about forty-five thousand men, in three divisions.

These men may be part of a division that is operating independently, or they may be getting their orders from the headquarters of a whole army."

"What do you mean by army? The whole German army?"

"No. You know roughly how they will divide their forces, don't you? An army has a certain work to do. It may be of almost any size — two hundred, three hundred, even five or six hundred thousand men. That is, from five to fifteen army corps. It has its own commanding general, who is responsible to the general staff. One plan that I've heard talked about as likely to be used by the Germans is to have two armies coming through Belgium, one through Luxembourg, one through Lorraine and one from the Rhine Valley. Then they would have one army in East Prussia and another in Silesia to fight against the Russians."

"I see. Paul, aren't you hungry? I am."

"So am I, now that you remind me of it! Let's see if we can't buy something to eat. I think we can, if the Germans haven't taken everything."

But now, as they went about trying to find someone to sell them food, they found that Arthur's fear as to the opinion the villagers had of them was justified by the facts. At first they met only excuses.

"I have had to give up all I can spare for the Prussians," they were told.

But finally, when they went to the shop of Raymond the butcher, hoping to buy some meat and cook it for themselves, they got plain speech.

"Go to your Prussian friends if you want food!" said Raymond, eyeing them angrily. "You will get none from any good Belgian in Hannay, I can tell you!"

"The Prussians are not our friends! They forced us to come back with them because they had forbidden everyone to travel in the direction we had taken," said Paul.

"Tell that to the gatepost!" said Raymond. "Be off with you! You fooled our people this morning, but now they know the truth."

And so Paul and Arthur faced the prospect of

going hungry. They might have appealed to Major Kellner, who had shown himself inclined to be friendly toward them, apparently because his boy was, like them, a Boy Scout. But that neither of them would do.

“I’d rather go without than ask the Germans for anything!” said Arthur.

“So would I!” agreed Paul. “But I would like to get away from here.”

That, however, proved to be impossible. Sentries were posted all about the village, and new notices had been added to those the Uhlans had posted earlier in the day, forbidding anyone to leave Hannay until permission was given by the officer in command of the German troops.

“I could laugh if it weren’t so unpleasant!” declared Paul. “These poor people, whose village would be in ruins now except for us, think we have betrayed them! And the Germans would send us home as prisoners, if we were lucky, if they even guessed that it was because of us that they were kept from taking Liege in their first attack!”

“The only one who gave us so much as a friendly look was the wife of Raymond, the butcher,” said Arthur, thoughtfully.

“Did you see that? So did I! I think perhaps he has got his courage back and has frightened her — but she was on our side this morning, too. Perhaps if we could see her alone, a little later, she would sell us some food. I tell you what we will do. We will watch to see if he does not go out, and then if the coast is clear, we will try her again.”

“Yes. Paul, I shall never let them send a beggar away who asks for food if we ever get home! I know now how they must feel.”

The two scouts were in no danger of starvation, of course, and they were plucky enough, as they had certainly proved, to be able to endure a little discomfort if it were necessary. But they suffered the more from their hunger because there was nothing for them to do. Until the Germans revoked the order that kept them from leaving Hannay, they could not make a move toward giving the proper authorities the information they pos-

sessed. And so they tried to be patient while they watched for Raymond to go out in the dusk that was now beginning to fall.

They saw him several times, when men came to his shop and went in to talk to him. And at last, when it was almost dark, he emerged, looking stealthily about him as he came into the street, perhaps for German soldiers. There were none near by. All save the sentries were gathered together about a great fire that they had built, and were singing while the busy camp cooks prepared their supper for them. This was the first time that Paul and Arthur had heard German troops singing. They were to learn, before long, that that was their usual custom when they were off duty.

Now, as soon as the butcher was well out of sight — he had gone, they noticed, in the direction of the barricade he had caused to be built — the scouts went quickly to his place and went in. There was one light placed by the door, but at first they could not see his wife. Then they heard the sound of someone sobbing, and called. It was the

woman who had helped them in the morning.

“Oh!” she said, chokingly. “It is you! I hoped you would come — poor boys! Here is a parcel of bread and meat I hid for you. Oh, I am in such trouble!”

“Why? What is the matter?” asked Paul.

She trembled and for a moment seemed afraid to say more. Then she gathered her courage.

“It is Raymond,” she said. “He has concealed some guns! He and some of the others mean to fire on the German officers!”

“But that is madness!” said Paul. “What good does he think that will do?”

“He says that the men, without their officers, will be terrified and will run away. He says it is an easy thing to do, since they think all our men are afraid of them.”

“It ought to be stopped for their own sake, and for the sake of Hannay,” said Arthur. “I thought Paul was wrong at first, but I can see now that he was not.”

“Do you know their plans? Tell me all you

know," said Paul quickly, in a tone of command.

"You will not — betray them to the Germans?"

"I am a Belgian," said Paul. "I shall try to save them and all in Hannay from the ruin that such a thing would mean. You may trust me."

"Then the guns are hidden in the cellar of Marcel's wine shop. They plan to get into the cellar from the back of the house, where there is a concealed door. Very late one of them is to raise an alarm — how I do not know. They expect the German officers to run out of the doctor's house, and then they will shoot them down. It will not be before midnight."

"Then there should be time enough to stop it," said Paul, with decision. "Thank you for your bread and meat, madame. Perhaps we shall repay you by saving your home and your husband's life. Come on, Arthur."

"What will you do, Paul?" asked Arthur, when they were alone.

"I don't know yet, Arthur. I want to see this wine shop. Then perhaps we can make up a plan

together. It would be easy to tell the Germans, but they would burn the wine shop. And I do not want to tell them if there is another way."

CHAPTER XVI

THE WINE SHOP

In the wine shop, when they came to it, they found none of the men of Hannay. The German soldiers, off duty for a little while, had taken possession of the place, and the sound of their singing, which could be heard as soon as one came within a hundred yards of the place, showed that they were happy. The two scouts looked in as they passed the window. They saw the invaders there, looking less like soldiers than they had imagined German troops ever could look. A few of the men were resting their feet, having taken off their heavy hobnailed boots, and were sitting in their woolen socks. Some were playing cards; nearly all were smoking.

“It’s safe enough,” said Paul. “If we can find that back entrance, I think we can get into the cellar. The worst of it is that they may have a guard there.”

It was Arthur who found the entrance to the cellar. He led the way down the stone steps, and they found themselves in a whitewashed vault, scrupulously clean, as are practically all Belgian houses from garret to cellar. There was a lantern, too, shedding a dim but most welcome light on the place, with its rows of casks and hogsheads.

“That’s a piece of luck, that lantern,” said Paul. “Only it shows something we’ll have to look out for — that we may have a visitor any moment. Look over there, Arthur. There’s a little space behind that row of barrels. If anyone comes we can hide there.”

But Arthur had another idea. Before Paul could stop him, he sprang lightly up the stairs that led to the room above, whence the sound of the German soldiers came very plainly. He fumbled for a moment at the door before he returned.

“I thought I might find that,” he said. “I’ve shot a bolt on the door. That will hold anyone who tries to come down for a few moments at least, and it will give us time to get out the way

we came. We may wish to escape, you see."

"Good!" said Paul. "All right! Now let's try to find those guns."

But of guns or weapons of any sort they could find no trace. They looked behind all the barrels and casks and under every possible hiding place. They lifted some of the barrels, though to do so was a considerable task, and the result was the same.

"Perhaps they have chosen some other hiding place or else the woman did not really know, and only suspected," suggested Arthur.

But that explanation did not satisfy Paul. And in a moment he had an inspiration. At once he began trying to tip back the great hogsheads at one side of the vault. The third yielded easily, and he immediately pried off its top.

"Aha, here we are!" he said. "Look, Arthur! I noticed that some of these were empty, but I thought anything like a gun would rattle around inside. But do you see what they did? They have the guns here, but they're packed in with rags and

sacking, so they can't move and make a noise."

"That was clever!" said Arthur. "I suppose they expected the Germans to make a search."

He drew out a gun, a shotgun with a sawed off barrel. The shortening of the barrel served a double purpose. It made it possible for the gun to be hidden in the barrel, and it made of it, also, at close range, a far more dangerous and formidable weapon than it had been in its original form.

"What are we to do with them? Where shall we hide them?"

"Nowhere. We shall put them back," said Paul. "When we have finished with them, that is. Here, let me show you!"

He took the sawed off shotgun, opened the breech, and in a moment had hopelessly shattered the firing mechanism.

"There, do you see? They'll find their guns—but they'll have trouble in firing them! That's better than taking them away, because it's so much safer."

"Oh, I should say so!"

They were busy for five minutes getting out the guns, of which there were only a dozen all told, breaking them and then putting them back. They left the place as they found it, and the guns themselves, moreover, would not immediately give up the secret of how they had been treated.

“I wonder if we can’t find the ammunition?” said Paul, when they had finished their work with the guns. “Then we could really finish the job.”

But the search for that proved vain. Though they looked everywhere they came upon no hidden store of bullets or powder. Nor had Paul really hoped that they would.

“They’d carry that with them, naturally,” he said. “Well, it doesn’t make much difference. We — ”

On the word there was a noise outside. They stopped, listening. Down the steps by which they had entered came footsteps, and they first saw heavy boots and then a pair of stout legs come into the range of the lantern. For a moment they were rooted to the spot, and in that moment the rest of

the descending figure came into view, and they saw that it was Raymond. In the same moment he saw them, and cried out sharply, fear and anger mingled in his voice. That ended the spell that had held them still. Arthur started a rush toward the newcomer, but Paul caught his arm.

“No! Upstairs!” he cried.

As he spoke, he seized the lantern from the hook where it hung, and swung it around, extinguishing the feeble flame at once. And then, as Raymond with a roar of rage started toward them, he flung the lantern straight at him. A cry of pain told him that his aim had been true, even in the darkness, and then he leaped up the stairs after Arthur, who was already fumbling at the bolt. In a moment they were through the door and had burst into the midst of the astonished soldiers in the taproom above.

For just a moment their sudden appearance caused excitement and confusion among the soldiers, who must have imagined that this was a surprise attack. But then some of the men, who had

seen them talking with Major Kellner earlier in the day, recognized them and a shout of laughter went up.

"It is only those boys!" cried one soldier. "Here, you young ones, you must stay to supper, now that you have come!"

He seized Paul and forced him into a chair, while another did as much for Arthur.

"Come, landlord, your best for our guests!" cried half a dozen of the soldiers.

Marcel, the landlord, who evidently knew only too well what his cellar contained beside wine and beer, was staring at them with a white, panic-stricken gaze. But he turned to obey, none the less; he was in deadly fear, it was plain, of the boyish soldiers. They might be willing to jest now, but he knew that they were the same men who fought like devils, and if reports were true (which they were not!) cut off the hands of women and children.

He brought food, and one of the soldiers handed Paul a glass of wine.

"Now, then!" cried the German. "You shall drink a toast to the good Kaiser Wilhelm, who is now King of Belgium as well as of Prussia, and who will eat the first course of his Christmas dinner in Paris and fly to London in a Zeppelin for the second! Skoal!"

"Ja! Ja wohl! A toast to the Kaiser by the young Belgian!" cried some of the others.

Paul got up, the glass held firmly in his hand. His cheeks were blazing.

"I will give you a toast!" he cried. "To Kaiser Wilhelm! May he eat his Christmas dinner in Saint Helena, with the ghost of Napoleon to keep him company! And may King Albert and King George and the Czar and the president of France enjoy a dinner that shall be served to them in the palace of Potsdam!"

And then he flung down the glass, so that it was shattered on the stone floor, and the red wine ran over the white flags.

"And so say I and every other good Belgian!" echoed Arthur.

For a moment there was a stunned silence in the room. The German soldiers, aghast at such daring, stared with open mouths and wide eyes. And then there was an angry murmur, spreading from one man to another, as the enormity of Paul's daring sank in.

"He has insulted the Kaiser! He has dared to be disrespectful toward our Emperor! He has refused to drink to his health!"

"Do what you like!" cried Paul, thoroughly aroused now, as Arthur had seen him roused only once or twice before, and utterly indifferent to what might happen to him. "I am not afraid of you! Come, stop us if you like!"

And then while the angry muttering continued, and each of the German soldiers seemed to wait for one of the others to make the first move, Paul and Arthur, side by side, without looking to right or left, walked out of the place and into the open air of the single street of Hannay. For a moment, after they passed outside, they heard nothing, though they had expected to be pursued and

brought back. And then suddenly from behind them there came the last sound they could have expected or hoped to hear — a tremendous roar of laughter! Paul's courage in defying them had won the admiration of the German soldiers at last. Brave men are nearly always ready to pay a tribute to bravery in others.

But if they had escaped from one danger, they had still to face another and one that might be even greater, as they well knew. For Raymond, the butcher, had seen them in the cellar. No doubt he knew by this time what had happened to his guns, and he would certainly know who was to blame for their condition. He would be more certain than ever that they were traitors to Belgium, since he was too stupid to understand how well the scouts had served him, and it was sure that he and his cronies of the civic guard would make some attempt to secure revenge.

Indeed, even as they came into the street, Paul saw a lurking figure across the way, that moved as they did.

“Don’t look around,” he whispered to Arthur. “But I think that Raymond is watching us from the other side of the street. We must be careful.”

And then, suddenly, without the slightest warning, a whistling sound that both scouts knew well after their experience during the shelling of the German battery near their old home, was heard overhead. It was followed in a few seconds by a terrific explosion. But fortunately the explosion was at some distance. The shell, for it was a shell that they had heard, burst outside of the village and did no damage.

But it created a tremendous effect, none the less. At once the German officers came running from the doctor’s house where they were quartered, and, as more shells burst nearby, bugles sounded, and the German soldiers came running to the centre of the village, gathering rapidly from the houses where they had been enjoying their brief respite from war. Sentries and all were called in, and within three minutes the troops were off, at the double quick, going in the direction whence

they had come to enter the village of Hannay.

And now the comparative silence of the night, that had been broken before then only by the dull and intermittent thunder of the guns around Liege, was shattered in a thousand ways. Heavy firing by infantry rifles, as well as by field guns, came from the north. It was plain that Belgian or French troops must have been advancing with great rapidity to interfere with the German raid on the country between Liege and Brussels. Flashes of fire marked the bursting shells less than a mile away, and occasional spurts of flame showed where the German guns were replying to the sudden attack. In a moment Hannay was deserted by the Germans. And before the villagers, led by Raymond, had collected their scattered wits, Paul had seen the chance of escape.

“Come on!” he cried, to Arthur.

They ran as fast as they could after the Germans.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BATTLE

They had not gone more than a hundred yards when a wild outburst of shouting behind them told them that their flight had been discovered. At least there seemed to be no reason for the people in Hannay to raise such a din. And the cries showed them, too, that they were being pursued. But such a pursuit did not frighten them. They had taken to the fields almost at once, deserting the road, and with such a start as they had it was practically impossible for them to be overtaken, especially by such stupid pursuers as Raymond and his men.

So, before they had gone any great distance toward the sounds of firing, which had now increased to a point that showed that they were in the neighborhood of something very like a pitched battle, a general engagement, they slowed down to a walk and waited to see what would happen. In

the road the pursuit stormed past them, but that did not last long. In a few minutes they heard the voices of the returning villagers, who had evidently decided that to keep on was too likely to bring them into the field of operations.

And so for the time at least, the two scouts were free and safe.

“Thank heaven that’s over!” said Arthur. “Paul, I never was so frightened in my life! It seems to me that we were really between the devil and the deep blue sea back there!”

“We certainly were!” said Paul, with a laugh. “The Belgians thought we sided with the Germans, and the Germans knew we didn’t! I suppose it was foolish to defy them like that, but I couldn’t do anything else.”

“I should hope not!” said Arthur. “And I don’t think it was foolish at all — and neither do you, really, Paul. Perhaps they will find out, if a few more things like that happen, that it won’t be so easy to conquer Belgium as they think, even if we are only a little bit of a country!”

“What I’m wondering is what we’d better try to do next,” said Paul, thoughtfully. “That sounds like a real battle in front of us, Arthur. The firing is getting heavier all the time, and on both sides, I think, as if more and more troops were being brought up. You see, we haven’t any idea at all of what’s going on, except just where we’ve happened to be. We haven’t had any news since the Germans caught us the first time.”

“Can’t we get to the Belgian lines?”

“We can try, of course. We must bear well to the west, which will bring us behind the skirmish lines. I think the place for us to try to reach now is Tirlemont. There must be a sort of headquarters there, I think, because it’s on the railway, and any railway is important in time of war. Yes, I believe that’s where these troops must have come from. They could be brought there from all over Belgium, you see, and sent out to try to check the German advance.”

They could follow the line of the battle readily now, for the firing was heavy and well marked,

showing that the line along which the fighting was going on was five or six miles long. The bursting shells, too, dotting the darkness with patches of light every few seconds, marked out the battle line, so that they could lay their course to get away from it. Both of them understood the need of doing that; it was now their business to get to some superior officers as quickly as possible with the valuable information they possessed about the German movements, though of course each hour of delay made it less likely that that information would be of any value. And on the firing line, if they were lucky enough to escape being shot, they would find no superior officers in any case, but only men charged with the duty of looking after their small, individual tasks, and too busy to pay any attention to them. It was the staff headquarters they wanted to reach.

And then, while they were going on as fast as they could, over the stubble of the fields, there was a sudden shifting of the lines in front of them. Immediately before them the firing was almost

doubled in violence, but on one side only. Apparently some heavier guns had been brought up by the Germans, and they saw that a terrific fire was being directed at the higher ground whence the flashes of the Belgian guns had been coming. One by one these guns were silenced, and then the bursting shells began to search out the ground in front of the Belgian artillery. Paul cried out in dismay.

“What is it? What’s the matter?” asked Arthur.

“I’m afraid it’s going badly for us there,” said Paul, gloomily. “Do you see, they’ve put our guns out of business! Now they are sending their shells right where our men must be massed. I don’t believe any troops can stand their ground long under such a fire as that.”

“They’re still there — they’re still answering, Paul!”

“Yes, but listen!”

Even above the roar of the battle now they could hear sounds of cheering. And, on one side,

much of the lighter rifle fire now died away.

“The Germans are advancing! It must be a charge against our men. And they can’t have had time to intrench!” said Paul. “Look! Didn’t I tell you so?”

It was almost as if they had been able to see. They could follow the bending of the Belgian line as it gave way before the furious advance. The artillery firing on the German side — on the German left wing, that is, and the Belgian right — ceased. And then, nearly half a mile beyond where it had been before, the rifle fire broke out again.

“There, can you tell what has happened?” asked Paul. “They’ve turned our wing — they must have rushed a lot of troops this way. We’re holding them well enough on the other side and in the centre, but our men will have to retire very soon. It’s awfully bad for us, because now the Germans are between us and Tirlemont, and I don’t see how we can get around them, because they will keep spreading out, no matter how

far we go,"' keen disappointment in his voice.

"I don't see how you can tell that from here, Paul!"'

"Watch the flashes from the guns nearest us — those are the Germans, now. The rifles, I mean — do you see, there? They're firing pretty regularly, and the flashes are very close together. They haven't spread out much. When they're firing, it looks as if a whole lot of lightning bugs were flashing all at once, and it makes a line along the ground. That's a curved line, now. A few minutes ago it was straight."

And now the German batteries opened up again on their left flank, and they were firing from a position that had been moved considerably westward since they had ceased firing after the infantry had begun pushing back the Belgian line. That was the most significant thing. These batteries had now evidently taken up a position that, at the beginning of the fight, had been held either by the most advanced of the German skirmishers or by the Belgians themselves. The German policy of

concentrating the attack at one spot, which has been the policy of great generals throughout all history, had worked well for them again.

But it was not the result of this fight, which could hardly be of really great importance whatever happened, that bothered Paul. It was the fact that by this sudden sweep of the German left he and Paul were again in the enemy's country, and almost hopelessly cut off from reaching the Belgian lines. For a moment he was almost ready to give up in despair. But that was not his style at all, and he soon recovered his spirits.

"There's no use in sitting here and wishing that things were different," he said, at last. "Come on! Let's get back to the road! If we can't go behind our own lines, let's go behind the Germans, and see how far we can get. They may be too busy to pay much attention to us, anyhow. Oh, I wish we had some way of getting around except by walking! We're losing all this time. That's what is going to ruin everything for us, just when it seemed that we had a chance to do something."

They got back to the road from which they had turned to avoid the enraged peasants of Hannay, and went along mournfully. Once they heard a loud crackling, and dodged immediately into the shelter of the hedge along the road. A German soldier, mounted on a powerful motorcycle, sped by; but he went so fast that they might have stayed in the road without attracting his attention. He came from behind them, from the direction of Hannay, and Paul groaned as they went out into the road again.

"They must be in force in that direction, too," he said. "That shows that it probably wouldn't have done us much good to go back around Hannay to try to strike another road. We would only have run into a lot more Germans, I suppose, if we had."

"There seem to be Germans everywhere," said Arthur. "How can there be so many of them?"

"That is the way they go to war. It is their plan always to have more men than the enemy. It is a good way, too. A thousand brave men can-

not beat five thousand, no matter how brave they are. The weight of numbers has won many a battle."

"Listen," said Arthur. "Do you hear that? It sounds as if another motorcycle might be coming from behind us."

They were climbing a stiff little grade, and were near the top. Paul stopped, and listened.

"No," he said. "That's not a motorcycle, but an automobile. I wonder—" He stopped and thought for a moment. "It's still half a mile or so away. It's worth trying! It would be a chance! And it can do no harm. Arthur, do you remember how we stopped their motorcycle when those two officers were chasing us after we had escaped from the house where they had hidden the guns and the shells?"

"Yes!" Arthur saw the idea at once. "We haven't any glass—but if we could find some sharp pointed stones?"

"Quick! Let's look!"

They were lucky. They found something better

than stones — for in the field right beside the road they discovered a veritable treasure, a pile of horseshoes, rusty and worn, that had been piled up there evidently by some farmer, against the time when he should decide to carry them all to the blacksmith to be used again. In some nails still projected; all of them, at any rate, had some sharp points. They worked frantically, while the song of the motor of the approaching car seemed to din “Hurry! Hurry!” into their ears. And then, just as the gears of the car were shifted at the bottom of the hill, and it began its laborious ascent, they were finished.

“Now!” cried Paul, springing back into the shadow of the hedge. “Now we’ll see whether our luck has changed! It has been against us ever since we got to Huy. It is time, I think, that we had a little good fortune! Perhaps it will do us no good, even if those nails and horseshoes do puncture the tires. But we shall see!”

On came the car. The hill was one of those long, steady ascents that is particularly trying to

a fast motor car, high geared and meant to make great speed on the level, and it came up slowly. But just before the real crest of the hill was reached there was a lessening of the grade, and the driver shot into his high speed to get a good start. That was what Paul had hoped for; that, and something else that he had not dared to voice as a hope, so faint was the chance that it would come true.

Now, however, as he saw the car, he could scarcely repress a cry of exultation.

“There’s only one man!” he said to Arthur. “Now if those nails will only do their part!”

The car shot forward, and in a moment there was a roar as a tire blew out, and then another, and another. Three tires went, and a hissing of freed air showed that the other was punctured!

CHAPTER XVIII

VICTORY !

There came a savage exclamation of rage from the solitary driver of the car, as it swerved violently and dangerously before he could stop it. Then, still muttering, he was out of the car and at the task of jacking it up. Evidently he was in a fearful hurry and it was easy to guess that his errand was one of the most pressing importance, for, though he kicked the horseshoes away, and so evidently understood what had caused his mishap, and knew that it could not have been accidental, he wasted no time in looking for whoever had caused it.

Instead he went to work with a will, ripping off the deflated tires and attaching others. He worked fast and furiously, and with the skill of one accustomed to the task.

“What are we to do now? Rush him?” whispered Arthur. “We can do it while he is bending

over like that, and the two of us ought to be able to hold him down, too."

"We can't take any chances," Paul whispered back grimly. He showed Arthur a horseshoe that he had retained. "He's a German officer and an enemy, and we have a right to do anything we can to damage the enemy. I'm going to hit him with this. If I do it right, he won't be able to move for some time."

Arthur shuddered a little. The idea of actually attacking a man from behind in such a way was unpleasant. But he realized that Paul, who had a reputation for gentleness, could like the idea as little as he did himself, and also that it was vitally necessary to secure possession of the car, though even yet Paul's whole plan had not come to him.

"All right!" he said. "Come on, then!"

"No; wait until he has finished! We might as well let him do the work, and have the car ready."

"But he will do the tires on this side first! He will be on the other side of the car afterward."

"No, he won't. He's got to come back to this

side when all the tires are on because the jack is on this side. Don't you see?"

"Oh, yes. I didn't think."

They waited breathlessly while the German worked. There was something oddly familiar about him, but his long, flowing overcoat prevented them from seeing him very well. He wore a uniform cap, fortunately, instead of a helmet, which would have given him a much better chance since it would have been very difficult for Paul to do what he planned with a helmet in the way.

Bad as the accident had been, the German worked so fast that in a very few minutes he had all the tires on, and was pumping them up as fast as possible. Then, when that was done, he came back, as Paul had seen that he must, and stooped over to remove the jack that had lifted the wheels from the ground. And that was the moment in which Paul struck.

"Stay behind!" he whispered, to Arthur. "I may need your help if anything goes wrong."

Then with one leap he reached the German. He

landed quietly, and, though the German heard him and half turned, it was all over in a second. Paul brought down his horseshoe on the officer's skull, and he crumpled without a cry and fell in a silent heap in the roadside.

"Quick!" cried Paul. "Look under the seat! There ought to be drinking water there."

Arthur found a vacuum bottle, and a big gallon bottle of mineral water. This Paul broke, and, dipping a handkerchief in it, made a wet bandage for the German's head. Then he dropped the vacuum bottle where the officer must find it when he recovered consciousness. And now he did something that surprised Arthur. He stripped off the officer's coat, took his uniform jacket and his cap. These he himself donned, and, though they were far too big for him, he cried out with satisfaction at the fit of the cap.

"Now do you see?" he cried. "I bet we could go through the German lines like this! Hello!"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, but this is that chap Poertner — one

of the men we got away from! He was taken into Liege as a prisoner. Don't you remember? He must have got away or else the Germans must have taken the fort where they were holding him! I'm afraid it's that!"

But there was no more time to be wasted. Paul leaped to the steering wheel of the car.

"In with you, Arthur!" he cried. "Get down, so that you won't be seen. Down low, on the floor!"

"Why?" asked Arthur, though he had obeyed before he asked the question.

"You haven't any uniform. You'd be spotted at once. If they see me in this rig, they may mistake me for a German officer, you see. That's why I took it. I was sorry to have to do it, but it's war, and all's fair! Now we're off!"

On the word he turned the car around, and they were really off in another moment, racing down the hill that the car had just climbed so laboriously, to have its journey so ingloriously halted.

"It's a wonderful little car. They must use a

lot of these for dispatch bearers," said Paul. "Arthur, isn't it lucky that Marcel showed us all about how to run different sorts of cars? I hope he's all right. I bet he enlisted too, if Uncle Henri joined the army when he went to Brussels."

"It runs so smoothly and it's ever so much faster than the fastest horse, of course," said Arthur. "I suppose all the armies must be using automobiles for this sort of work. Where are you going, Paul?"

"I'm going to make a great big circuit, if we're not stopped before we really get started," said Paul. "On foot we never could have got ahead of the Germans in that sweeping flank movement of theirs. But now, when we can make sixty miles an hour, I should think we ought to be able to do it. I think the worst time will be right along here in the first ten miles or so. All I'm hoping is that we don't run into the people who know where Poertner was going in this car. I think we can get by anyone else. But there's no telling where he did start from. Perhaps from Huy."

"Huy? But we were there this morning — and our troops were there, too!" exclaimed Arthur, plainly puzzled.

"That doesn't mean that they're there now. Huy couldn't have held out for more than a few hours against a real attack. And we had very few troops there. Our concentration seems to be further north."

They swept through Hannay at a terrific pace, but not so fast as to prevent them from seeing that the wine shop was still open and that it was full of Raymond's men. Paul sounded a blast on the siren of his car, the peculiar siren that indicated its military character, and laughed at the rush of people to the door of the shop. Then they were out in the open road again.

And now Paul's knowledge of the geography of the country stood him in good stead. Twinkling camp fires showed that they were running toward a country that was literally swarming with Germans. Now more than ever, it was plain that from all around Liege a great advance movement was

being pushed. Despite the battle that was still raging behind them, these troops seemed to be in camp, a plain proof that the Germans must still have troops enough and to spare behind them, though here were fresh divisions that would not be engaged at all.

In the southwest the lights of Huy could be seen, but they gave no clue as to which army held the town. Only the fires that dotted the ground, clustered about Huy in a great semicircle, seemed to indicate that perhaps the Germans had not yet entered the town. They were west of it, however, though only a few, toward Namur, and Paul muttered angrily to himself as he saw that well west of Huy the fires stretched in a solid line between that place and the fortress of Namur.

“We won’t be able to reach Namur, I’m afraid,” he said. “We might get through, but I believe that our best chance is to swing right around Huy, staying well inside the line of the fires, and slip past it, just to the west. There is a bridge there, too. I don’t believe we could cross

the Meuse anywhere else between Huy and Namur."

Twice they passed roadside patrols of Germans, but Paul's appearance was deceptive, and the soldiers simply sprang to attention as the flying car swept by, standing with their hands raised in salute. Paul knew that at any moment he might run into a patrol less easily satisfied, but that was a chance that had to be taken.

Now he was picking his way carefully, having reduced his speed a little. Twice he boldly left the road and drove the car across the soft ground of fields, for he had to follow a semicircle, and the road, had he stuck to it, would have brought him right up to one of the camps each time. But at last he was heading north and west again, and he heaved a sigh of great relief.

He had to sacrifice speed now for a time to certainty. To have taken a false turn would have spelled disaster, and, though he knew the map of the country well enough, he had never traveled these roads himself. But soon all danger seemed

to be over. They were coming nearer to the sounds of the battle again. These had died away for a time, and the fight had seemed to be over. But whichever side had been losing had brought up reinforcements, and as the first faint streaks of light in the east that foretold the dawn began to spread in the sky the din was louder than ever.

"Where are you trying to go?" asked Arthur.

"To Eghezee," said Paul. "That is a fair sized town and we ought to find a telephone exchange still working there, with wires into Brussels that haven't been cut. There is its smoke -- do you see it right ahead?"

Arthur raised his head to look. And he saw something else. To the right of the town, which was still two miles away, there was a moving mass of grey.

"There come the Germans, too!" he groaned. "And they're nearer than we are!"

Paul's answer was to urge the car to still greater speed. Arthur was right. Heavy masses of Germans — Paul guessed there was a full di-

vision of twenty thousand men — were advancing toward the town. They were still some distance away, but they were moving fairly fast.

“It’s the railway they’re after, that line runs between Namur and Tirlemont,” said Paul. “Well, we’ve got to risk it now. Perhaps they will catch us, but if we have any luck we’ll get our messages through.”

They came into a town that was almost wholly deserted, as it seemed. The Germans had given warning of their coming, and the people had fled. But in the building that was used by the telephone system there were still signs of life. The door was open, and when, having left the car outside, they burst into the room that contained the big switchboard, they found a girl sitting there calmly, waiting for the calls that did not come.

“Can you get Tirlemont?” cried Paul. “We must talk to the office of the headquarters staff there. Say that we have come from Liege and have a message from Major du Chaillu.”

The girl stared at them incredulously for a mo-

ment. She had had the pluck to stick to her post when she knew the Germans were coming, and now she went to work without argument.

“If the wires are not cut!” she said. She manipulated the plugs and then, after a brief delay, pointed to an instrument.

“A message from Major du Chaillu!” said a voice in Paul’s ear. “Impossible—he is here!”

“Thank Heaven!” cried Paul. “Call him to the telephone!”

In another moment he was telling what they had learned. He gave the information concerning the great extent of the German strength first, and was rewarded by a cry of astonishment. And then he told of their situation; of how, having captured the car and fled through the whole German army, they were now almost certain to be captured.

“With that coat—and the automobile!” cried du Chaillu. “My boy, I am afraid they would shoot you! How far away are they?”

“Very near.”

“Eh? Oh, I have it! Listen!”

Paul's face lighted up as he heard the plan. "Yes — yes!" he cried. "I think we can! I think there will be time for that!"

There was a click. The wire had been cut somewhere between him and Tirlemont! But he did not care; he had done all that was needful. And now, shouting to Arthur to follow, he dashed from the building.

"Don't delay a second!" he cried. "Come! Major du Chaillu says a train, with an engine and one car, was held here to bring money from the banks so that the Germans would not get it! He is having a telegram sent to bid it wait! The station is a quarter of a mile away!"

Madly they ran through the deserted streets. Even as they ran past a wide street that entered the one in which they were, they saw the head of a German column coming down toward them. Never had they run so fast before, but even so, it seemed that they would never reach the station! But at last they were there; they dashed in — to see the train going out!

“The telegram must have come too late!” said Paul. “Well, perhaps they will not know what we have done. It may not be so bad — ”

“Look!” cried Arthur. The train had slowed down. Now it had stopped, just by a signal tower. From the engine a man dropped, looked back, and then began beckoning them on. They ran wildly toward him, and in a moment they were being pulled on board the train.

“The operator in the signal tower heard the message coming in just as we were starting,” said the conductor. “He set the signal against us and told us of the message! What good luck for you! Now, if the Germans haven’t cut the line, you are safe!”

And safe they were. The light train carried them to Tirlemont, and there they met not only Major du Chaillu, but their uncle, now Colonel de Frenard.

“We have informed the French staff of your news. It has changed the whole plan of campaign,” said du Chaillu. “Namur will be aban-

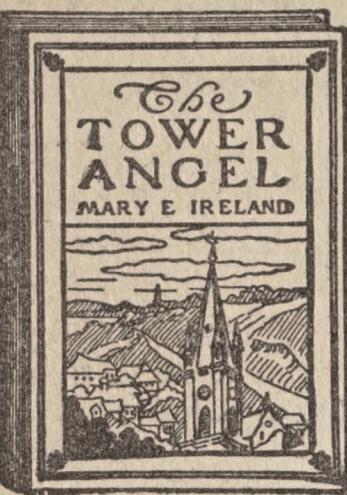
doned; the real defence will be made on the border. Thanks to you the French have escaped the trap that was being baited for them. And I have special orders concerning you."

"What are they?" asked Paul.

"You are to be sent to Brussels immediately. And there you are to be received by King Albert who has heard of your part in the defence of Liege, for which all the world has praised Belgium and her brave sons!"

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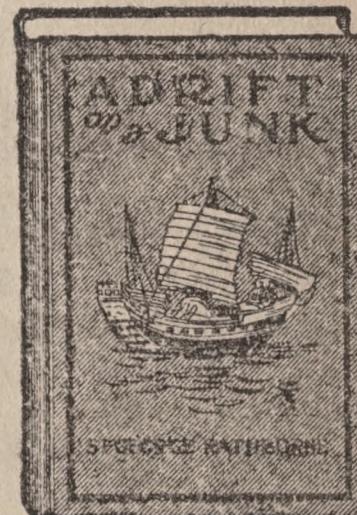
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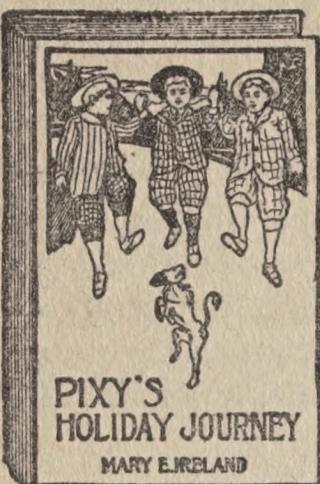
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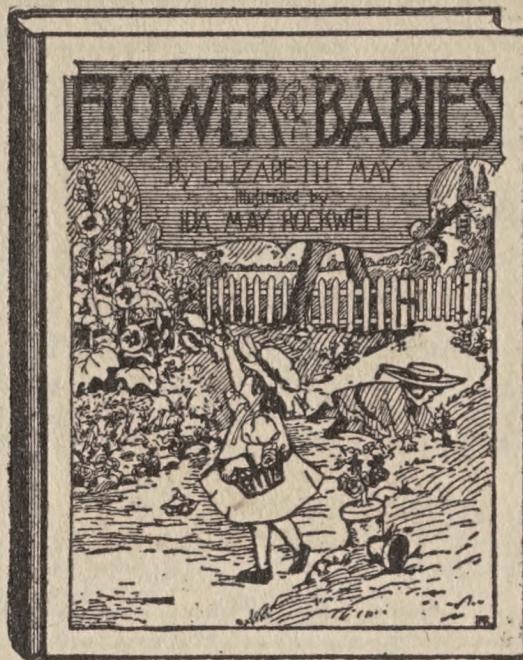
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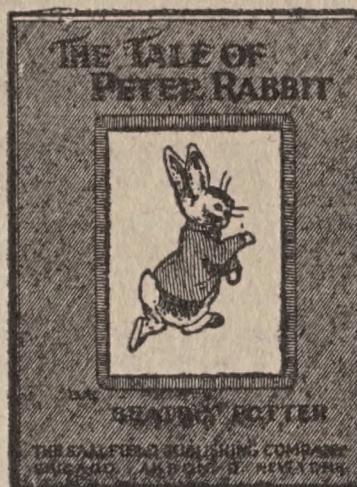
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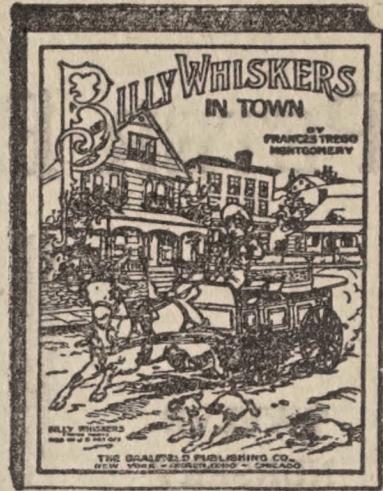
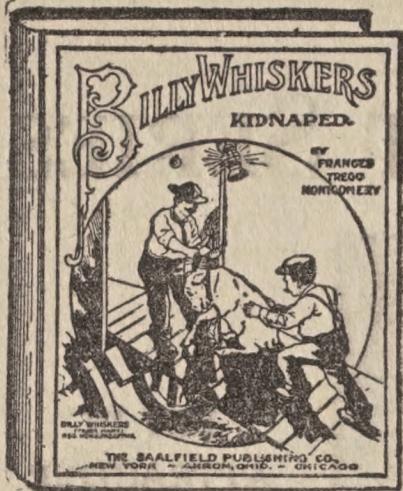
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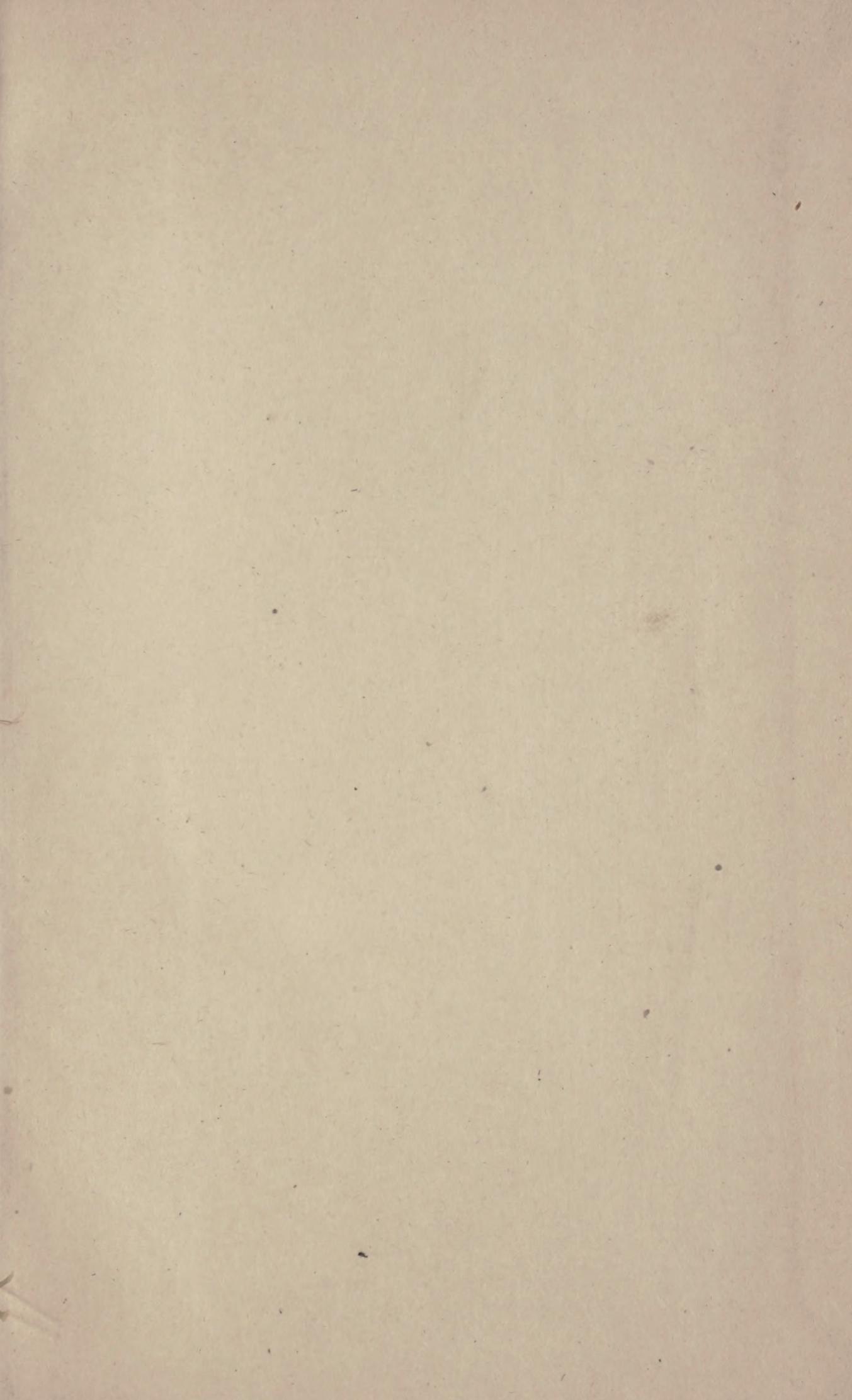
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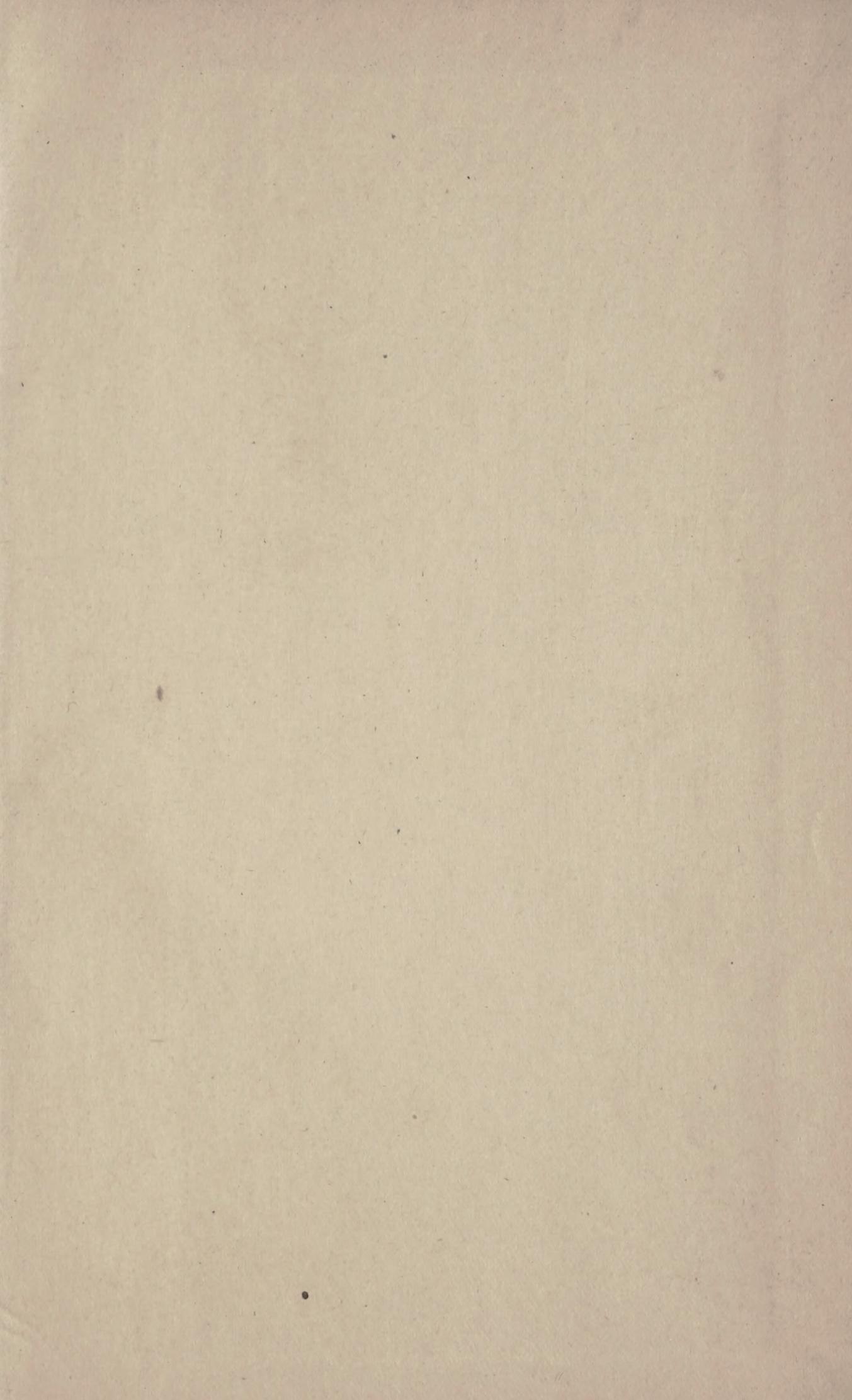
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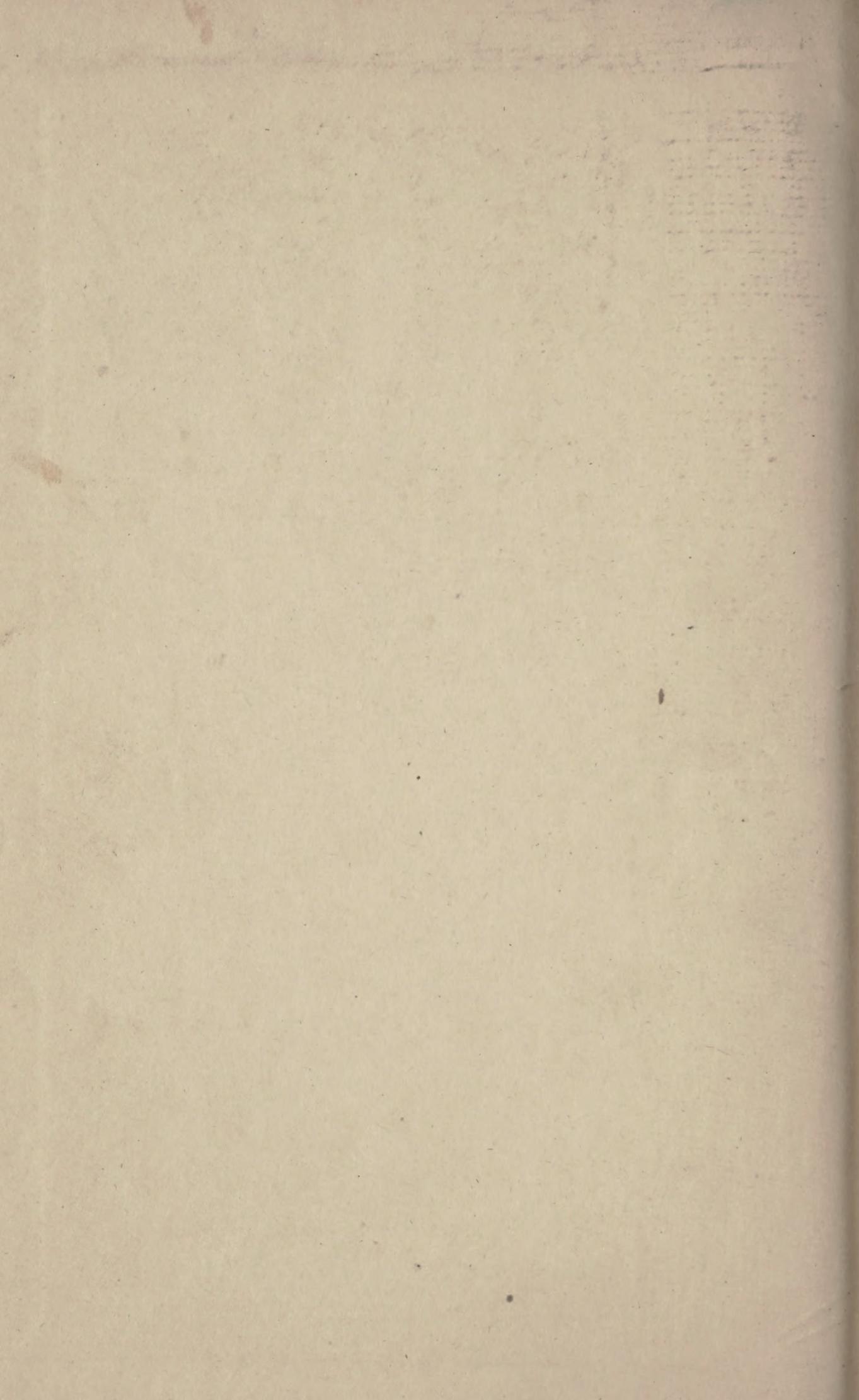
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